Volume 63 | Spring 2024

The NERA Researcher

The President's Message

Dear NERA Members,

It was a pleasure to see many of you at the AERA/NCME joint conferences in Philadelphia this April, whether it was a quick encounter at the Convention Center, during an evening reception, or passing by on the street. It is times like these that make you appreciate the importance of personal and professional connections you have which inspire us to keep finding ways to establish new ones. In this *Researcher* article, I want to highlight the significance of connections, focusing on one symbolic representation of bridges.

Growing up on Long Island in New York, the most common way off was to drive over a bridge, often paying a toll. The bridges tended to take on different designs, most with one deck and some with two, bearing the names of neighborhoods (Williamsburg, Throgs Neck, Whitestone) or famous political figures (George Washington initially, and more recently Robert F. Kennedy [Triboro], Ed Koch [Queensboro/59th Street], and Mario Cuomo [Tappan Zee]). Before electronic tolling, you needed to carry cash and coins to give to a person or for some bridges, you could throw specially designed tokens into baskets. In so many cases now, toll booths have been removed in favor of overhead gantries. In the end, the money you pay helps maintain the upkeep of the crossing.

From a more fundamental perspective, a completed bridge serves as a vital connector and allows for movement between otherwise separate pieces of land. This provides a previously unrealized opportunity to answer that famous question posed by the great Kermit the Frog about what lies on the other side of rainbows. Bridges open up new opportunities for exploration, collaboration, and progress, all that must be carefully nurtured to grow and evolve over time. As an example, you may be familiar with how the deck of the Bayonne Bridge in New Jersey,

Continued on page 3

NERA NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Inside this Issue

Executive Committee, Board of Directors, & Appointed Positions 2

Message from the Editors 2

Member News 3

2024 Call for Nominations 6

2024 Conference Overview ... 8

2024 Call for Proposals & FAQs 10

Membership Committee Update 16

Member Advocacy Committee Update 18

New Member Spotlight: Maura Maxfield (O'Riordan) 20

Seasoned Member Spotlight: Barbara J. Helms, PhD 21

2024 Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award Call for Nominations 22

2024 Thomas F. Donlon Award Call for Nominations 23

2023 Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award Recipient Attends AERA 25

Educator-as-Researcher Award Committee Update 26

2024 Educator-as-Researcher Award Call for Nominations 27

2023 GSIC Best Paper Award Winner & GSIC Report 30

Infrastructure Committee Report 32

Mentoring Program Report 33

Qualitative 101: Researcher Positionality in Qualitative Studies (Pt.3) 35

The NERA Researcher

The NERA Researcher is the official newsletter of the Northeastern Educational Research Association.

Message from the Editors

Happy Spring, NERA friends!

Flowers are in bloom, and we know you have all been busy as bees working on growing your NERA proposals.

In this Spring issue of *The NERA Researcher* you can find additional information about the 2024 conference, including bios of the excellent keynote speakers that the conference team has lined up. We would encourage you also to consider volunteering to be a proposal reviewer or a session chair or discussant. These are great ways to learn more about research in the field, get involved, and help shape the conference.

Please be sure to take a look at the awards available for nomination. It is such an enjoyable part of the conference to be able to recognize members for their achievements and contributions. Speaking of nominations, it's time to nominate NERA members to serve as President or Board Member. Serving on the Board is another good way to learn more about and contribute to the organization. Remember that you can also nominate yourself for these positions or for the awards!

We welcome news of your accomplishments and will share what we receive in the next issue. We would also be interested in hearing more about you in a Member Spotlight! In this issue, we round out the members of the Editorial Board with Spotlights on Maura and Barbara.

This issue features the third of three articles on qualitative research by Felice Billups. Thank you to Felice for helping NERA members to become more familiar with such an important methodology. Many thanks also go to the committee representatives and chairs submitting reports for this issue and sharing what they've been working on.

Finally, you may have noticed a name change for Maura. Going forward, she will be known as Maura Maxfield. She will be listed as Maura Maxfield (O'Riordan) in this issue to aid in that transition.

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originally opened in 1931 was raised in 2019 so that cruise ships could go under it and dock. However, as we saw recently at the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, even the best efforts to design the strongest and most beautiful bridges sometimes break. But even as we mourn the loss of life from this accident, we know the next version of the bridge will be done better and eventually, the connections across the Patapsco River will be restored.

It is in this spirit that I pivot to the upcoming NERA conference. Regardless of how many times you have attended, without question, it is a most special time of the year both personally and professionally. The opportunity to reconnect with old friends and colleagues, welcome new members into our circle, and deepen our knowledge of the field, is very hard to surpass in my view. I encourage you to check out the recording of the webinar we held in January where Hannah Smith, one of this year's conference co-chairs and Nellie Rushton, two-time NERA conference presenter in 2021 and 2022 while still in high school, share their experiences and insights gained from their involvement with NERA. To embody the essence of unity and collaboration, we introduced a new feature, the Member Spotlight, to highlight some members in the *Researcher*, not just about their professional and NERA work, but outside of those activities, so that you hopefully come to understand them better as people.

With the theme of "Promoting Social Responsibility in Educational Research", there is no other time like now to consider being part of what is sure to be a truly awesome event this October. Our keynote speakers, Beverly Leon from LocalCivics and Dr. Shaun Nelms from the University of Rochester, will share their inspiring stories. Beyond this, you will see how the offer to build bridges can lead to co-creation, something discussed at our April 18th webinar by Dr. Jane Shore and Sydnie Schwarz of Revolution School in Philadelphia. This will be also be reflected upon in some invited panels on topics such as civic education and culture at minority-serving institutions, with possible others on work to promote student success for first-generation students, and the emerging demographic of student parents. It is my hope that through these sessions lively dialogue will emerge to spur future collaborations. I have also engaged in outreach efforts to collaborate with other organizations committed to supporting educational research in our region such as the North East Association for Institutional Research (NEAIR) and the New England Educational Research Organization (NEERO), as well as new potential constituencies such as the educational data mining (EDM) community.

I wish to provide one more reason why you should be involved with the NERA conference this year. I recall the charge given to me many years ago by my boss when I worked in the Consumer Research

Member News

The Center for Educational Assessment at UMass Amherst presented at the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education Network Conference, focusing on stakeholder communication and receiving feedback on currently used testing practices and future plans for testing. Presenters included **April Zenisky**, **Kat Tremblay**, **Duy Pham**, **Jenn Lewis**, **Maura Maxfield**, and **Vafa Alakbarova.**

Emily Hotz, M.A., LPCA, received the Graduate Student of the Year Award from the Connecticut Counseling Association on May 3. Furthermore, Emily Hotz was hired by the University of New Haven as an adjunct professor and will teach group counseling this summer for master-level students!

Shu Jen Chen-Worley, associate professor at Touro University, was reelected SIG officer Treasurer/Secretary for Survey Research in Education of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) for the 2024–2025 term.

Samantha Harmon, associate professor at James Madison University, recently transitioned to Data Services Librarian at JMU and is dedicated to enhancing data literacy and management in academia. Leveraging her background in quantitative analysis, Samantha collaborates with stakeholders to tailor data services for all research and scholarly pursuits, empowering faculty and students in navigating research data complexities.

Continued on next page

department at a New York City-based advertising agency. My boss passed away recently, but he always reminded colleagues of our responsibility to be storytellers to our clients through the information we provided. My charge to you based on that advice is that the stories we share can have an incredible power to help build bridges in ways we never thought possible.

In closing, there is a rabbinic teaching related to the supposed location of the Ark of the Covenant. A certain priest was actively involved in his work and noticed that the section of the floor where he was working was slightly different compared to other sections. He went to relay this finding to a friend, but died suddenly before he could reveal the location (Mishnah Shekalim 6:2). While this story is not intended to be morbid, my point is that the connections we form through involvement at NERA are so unique that even if you and I listened to the same stories, ultimately our experiences will be different. I am hopeful that when we gather in Trumbull in October, we can create a strong bond, such that the story of what we accomplished together will be talked about for years to come.

Please continue to spread awareness about NERA and the upcoming conference through our Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram pages.

Best to you all,
Jonathan Steinberg
2023-2024 NERA President

Tania N. Sutherland, MSEd, Sixth Year student at the University of Bridgeport, had her first research publication with Dr. Jeffrey Vance, *Lift Every Black Voice and Shatter the Glass with an Inclusive CRE Music Education*. This research investigates the history of music education influence from Europe and the development of music education in the United States of America. It also challenges curriculum authors to write culturally responsive curricula for practitioners to meet the needs of inner-city students. https://rise.bridgeport.edu/2024/presentations/lifting-every-black-voice-to-singeducation/. Tania is also an award-winning musician and vocalist, to be specific in the reggae genre. Her passions are both education and music, which led her to her research—culturally responsive education in music education. There is a gap in the research for culturally responsive music education grounded in Critical Race Theory and Pragmatism. It is ongoing research; however, with the guidance of Dr. Vance, a piece of it was published at a major event, UB Rise. The objectives are to heighten student engagement and self-efficacy for Black students, highlight historical influences, and encourage researchers, policymakers, administrators, and educators to create and implement a culturally responsive arts education in the field of music education

A balance of research and practical advice, **Dr. Jakubowski, founder of CTJ Solutions,** has provided a number of works designed for qualitative researchers, policy analysis on why teachers leave the profession, and a rural education focus. Books include:

- Thinking about teaching (EduMatch)
- A cog in the machine (EduMatch)
- Crush it from the start: 50 tips for new teachers (School Rubric)
- Getting to the Hearts of Teaching (EduMatch)
- Rural education history (Lexington)

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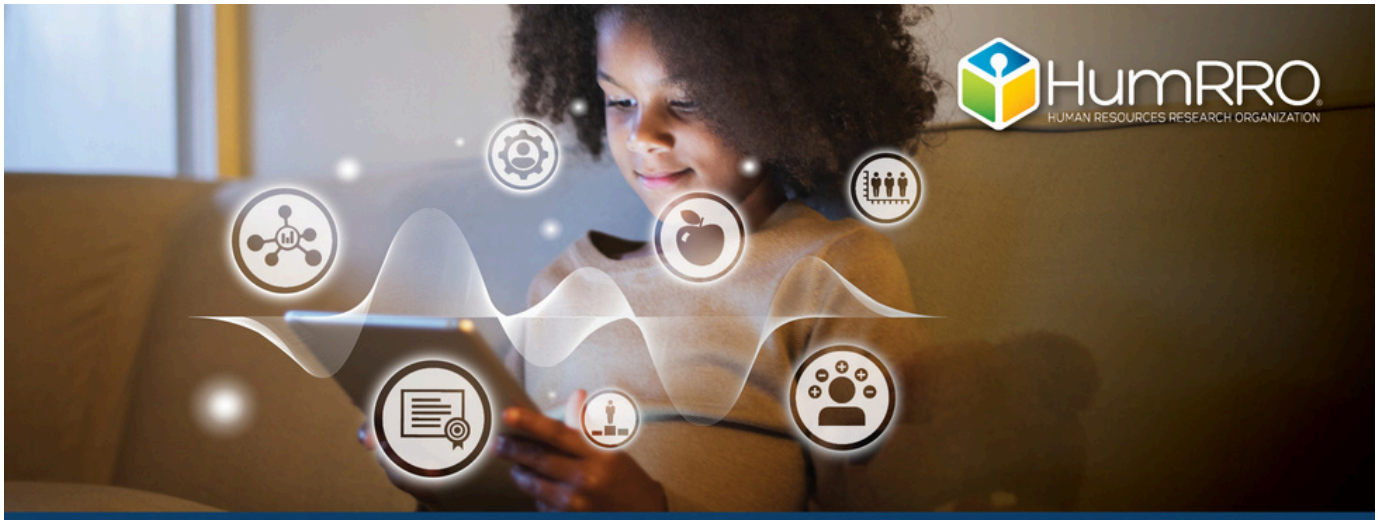

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Call for Nominations for President and Board Members

Bo Bashkov, *IXL Learning*, Chair

Dear colleagues,

As an entirely volunteer-run nonprofit organization, NERA relies on its members to volunteer their time and energy in key leadership positions. Serving NERA and its members ensures the success and longevity of this wonderful community of education researchers. This year, you may nominate yourself or a colleague for one of the following positions:

·NERA President (one position, 3-year term as President-Elect, President, and Past-President)

·NERA Board Member (two positions, each for a 3-year term)

The NERA Handbook (the first document linked on this page) describes the roles and responsibilities.

Please submit your nomination(s) to the Nominations Committee by June 30, 2024, at nominationscommittee@nera-education.org. If you nominate someone other than yourself, you must ensure their commitment. Note that all nominees must be current members of NERA. Thank you for your continued support!

Bo Bashkov
Past President and Nominations Committee Chair

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2024 Conference Overview and Welcome

Tuesday, October 8–Thursday, October 10, 2024

Trumbull Marriott Shelton, Trumbull, CT

Javier Suárez-Álvarez, Hannah Smith, Siyu Wan, and Caroline Prendergast
NERA 2024 Conference Co-Chairs

Dear NERA Members,

We are excited to share our plans for the upcoming conference! Seeing many of you at NERA 2023 motivated our team, and we have been meeting monthly since October to coordinate all the tasks that need to happen before we gather in Trumbull. However, before jumping into details for 2024, we would like to thank the 2023 NERA conference co-chairs—Francis O'Donnell, Maura O'Riordan, Mina Lee, and Sarah Ferguson—and Past President Bo Bashkov for a wonderful conference.

Our theme for 2024 is "***Promoting Social Responsibility in Educational Research.***"

In the ever-changing world of education and educational research, we must continually self-reflect and be reminded of the reasons for our work and the responsibility it entails. We always need to remember that we serve learners of all types. Promoting social responsibility in our work requires us to question the status quo with clear intent, collaborate with diverse groups of people, explicitly describe our methods, and openly and transparently communicate the results we find. Our success is dependent on continuously working to maintain strong and healthy communities of practice, ensuring all stakeholders' voices are heard and represented so that we support positive changes both in the field of education research and in society as a whole. Let us join together in this journey of rediscovery and recommitment to our shared values and mission as an organization. Please see the Call for Proposals for more details on this theme and the content strands for proposal submissions.

Please mark your calendars: **Proposals are due by Monday, June 3, 2024, at 11:59 pm EDT!**

We are always in need of volunteers to review proposals ahead of the conference and serve as chairs, discussants, or both during the conference. If you are interested, please follow the links below:

Volunteer to be a proposal reviewer
Volunteer to be a session chair or discussant

We have two confirmed Keynote Speakers who will deliver addresses related to our theme:

Tuesday, October 8: Beverly Leon is the founder and CEO of Local Civics, a non-profit that engages K–12 students in developing civic skills via game-based learning with an emphasis on aiding at-risk youth. With over a decade of experience in youth education and coaching, she has coordinated programs for Level the Field NYC and taught as a Fellow for Columbia University's civics education initiative. Beverly Leon holds a BA with a specialization in social entrepreneurship from Columbia Business School. She earned her BA in History from Columbia University and completed an MSc in Social Policy at the University of Oxford, where she concentrated on Education and Labor Market Policy. She is also a retired professional soccer player.

Wednesday, October 9: Dr. Shaun Nelms is Vice President for Community Partnerships at the University of Rochester and a renowned author in the field of education and school transformation. Before his position at the University, Dr. Nelms was superintendent of East Upper and Lower School (formerly East High School), which was the lowest-performing school in the area, and led a unique partnership between the New York State Education Department, Rochester City School District, and the University of Rochester. This partnership aimed to develop a school reform model that could be replicated in urban settings across the United States.

More conference details, including Invited Panels and Workshops, will be announced in the summer. As of this writing, we expect to have invited panels on civic education and culture at minority serving institutions.

The success of the NERA conference is in part due to the generosity of our sponsors who help make costs for attendance as manageable as possible. If you are interested in being a sponsor for this year's conference, please contact NERA President Jonathan Steinberg (president@nera-education.org).

Call for Proposals: Frequently Asked Questions

Proposal Submission:

1. How do I submit my NERA proposal? Please submit your proposal by accessing the Online Proposal System. The proposal system is open now and the deadline for submission is Monday, June 3, 2024 at 11:59 pm EDT. You may contact the conference co-chairs with further questions at NERA.CoChairs@gmail.com.

2. Does my research project have to be complete to be accepted to NERA? Not necessarily. Research that is in progress or nearly completed will be considered for the conference. Still, the researcher should show the potential of the work being ready for presentation by the conference date. We strongly encourage individuals to submit their in-progress work as Roundtable presentations. This format facilitates greater discussion between participants and the audience, allowing you to receive input and feedback that could inform your research or help you to overcome potential hurdles. In fact, for anyone doing a summer internship, we expect the work to be in progress at the time of submission.

3. How are the content strands used? These terms are used in several ways. Specifically, they will be used to match the proposal to the appropriate reviewers, place the proposal in the session where it fits best, and assign an appropriate discussant to the session. Therefore, please select the content strand that best matches your proposal as your first choice and two additional content strands as the next-best options.

4. How do the content strands differ from keywords used in previous years? The content strands were developed by combining one or more keywords into a more general theme. The table on the following page illustrates:

Content Area	Keywords
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice	Diverse Learners; Social Context in Education; Use & Interpretation of Results
Educational Research Methods	Program Evaluation; Qualitative & Mixed Methods; Quantitative Methods & Statistical Theory; Research Methodology
Educational Systems and Policies	Accountability; Educational Leadership; Policy in Education; Politics; School Reform
Higher Education Research and Practice	Career & Technical Education; Computer & Educational Technology; Curriculum & Instruction; Noncognitive/Behavioral Skills; Postsecondary Education; Teaching & Teacher Education
Measurement and Psychometrics	Educational Measurement; Psychometrics; Test Design & Development
PK-12 Education Research and Practice	Career & Technical Education; Cognitive Science; Computer & Educational Technology; Curriculum & Instruction; Early Childhood Education; Education & Psychology; Noncognitive/Behavioral Skills; Teaching & Teacher Education
Post-COVID Innovations and Solutions	*None – New Area for 2023*
Applications of AI	*None – New Area for 2024*
Miscellaneous	Education research topics that do not fit in the above areas

5. You have several session options for submitting proposals. Are any considered more rigorous than others? No. All formats are peer-reviewed methods for disseminating your research. The rigor of the peer review process is the same for all proposals submitted to the conference. Peer review allows NERA to maintain an appropriate quality level for the experience of those presenting their research and those receiving the research

6. What are the submission parameters for theme-based paper sessions/symposia? Those presenting proposals for theme-based paper sessions or symposia must submit only one proposal for all papers in the session, within a maximum of 1,000 words. In addition, the submission should include a description of how the papers are related and a short description of each of the papers included in the session. Lastly, proposers can indicate within the submission system that they are submitting a theme-based paper session/symposium.

Proposal Review and Acceptance:

1. What is the review process like? Reviewers are NERA member volunteers who have self-identified as willing to review proposals on the particular content strand(s). The conference co-chairs make final decisions on acceptance and format based on both the reviews and availability in the conference program.

2. When will my research paper need to be ready? Discussants must be able to review research papers before the session to prepare properly for discussion. Therefore, you must email your completed research paper to the discussant before September 24, 2024.

3. What if NERA accepts my presentation, but I am unable to attend the NERA conference when the time comes? Submitting to NERA is a sign that you intend to attend the conference if your presentation is accepted. However, if something prevents you from being present and coauthors or colleagues cannot present in your place, please withdraw your presentation before the session by contacting the conference team at NERA.CoChairs@gmail.com.

Preparing for Your Presentation:

1. Will a projector and laptop be available in my session? Institutional sponsors will be supplying LCD projectors for each session. The Chair of the session will arrange to have a laptop present and facilitate file transfers to the laptop via email before the session. Presenters are expected to cooperate with Chair requests.

2. What size should my poster be? Easels with foam display boards will be available for poster presentations. The poster size should be 36 x 48 inches, maximum. The display should be easily readable and clear at least three feet from the board. The title, author, and affiliation should be in a 36-point font or larger. The rest of your lettering should be in at least a 28-point font. Include diagrams, figures, photos, bulleted text, or other visuals that describe your research. Presenters should also prepare four PowerPoint slides (maximum) that will be shared electronically prior to the poster session to give attendees a short preview/overview of each study.

3. What is the role of the Chair? The role of the Chair is to facilitate the organization of the presentation session. Duties may include collecting the papers, communicating with authors, managing audio/visual equipment, and ensuring the timeliness of the session. In some cases, the Chair will assist in facilitating discussion among the audience members and authors.

4. What is the role of the Discussant? Discussants are responsible for drawing from their expertise to comment on papers and presentations. The goal is to provide professional and constructive criticism and raise issues that connect to the works for broader consideration.

5. How do Roundtable sessions work? Roundtable sessions offer the most opportunity for interactions among presenters and participants. Three to five researchers with similar interests are assigned to a table, along with a moderator with some expertise in the topic area. Individual researchers do not make a formal presentation as in a paper session but may provide a brief overview of their work and specific issues they would like to discuss. Much of the time during a roundtable session should be devoted to discussion among the assigned researchers and the other participants.

Attending NERA:

1. Where will I find information about the conference registration fees? Registration fees will be posted on the NERA website during the latter half of spring. There are three cost brackets: Professional, Retirees, and Students. Late fees are instituted after September 24, 2024. All registrants must also be NERA members. More information about membership and dues can be found on the NERA website (www.nera-education.org).

2. Is there a special room rate at the conference hotel? Yes, NERA negotiates a special room rate at the conference hotel for members each year. Room rates and registration information will be posted on the NERA website during the latter half of spring. A limited number of rooms are available at the negotiated room rate each year. More information about registering for both the conference and a hotel room will be available on the NERA website (www.nera-education.org).

3. Are meals included with registration? Yes, NERA is pleased to provide meals with conference registration regardless of whether or not members stay at the conference hotel. Meals will be provided in accordance with public health and safety guidelines at that time. Please contact the NERA co-chairs about any dietary concerns or restrictions you may have at NERA.CoChairs@gmail.com.

4. Are there any special benefits for Marriott BonvoyTM members? Yes, we will provide information about these through use of the app closer to the time of the conference.

5. Will there be childcare options? NERA members have identified two off-site providers near the hotel. We will provide information about these services at the time of registration.

6. What kind of financial support can NERA provide for attending the conference? Work is in progress for developing a potential travel grant program. More information will be provided closer to the time of the conference.

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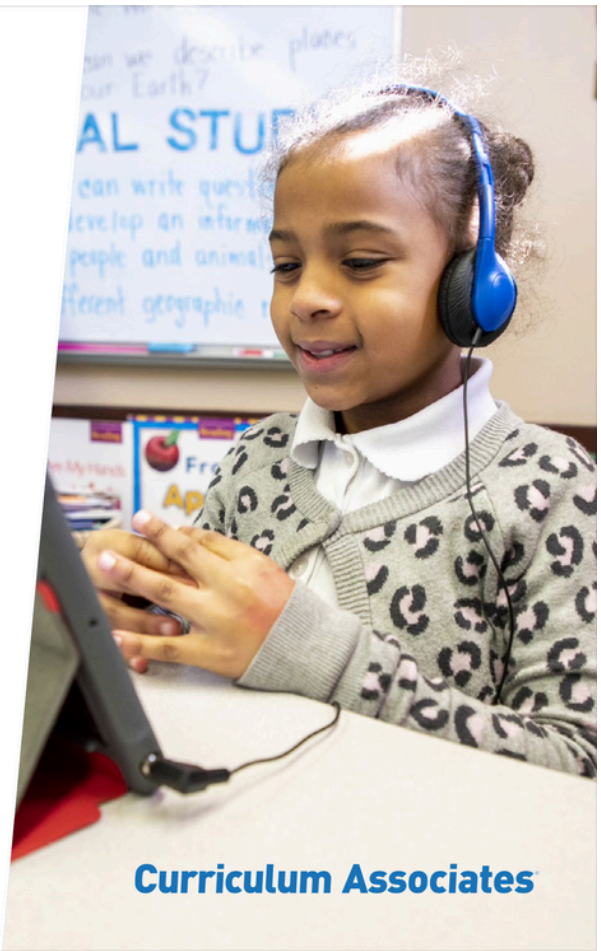

Curriculum Associates

Membership Committee Update

Bohdan Christian, *Stockton University*, Chair

The year has flown by, and as a new chair with plenty to learn, I wish to thank Jonathan and the Executive Team, and my fellow committee members for all their support. The NERA conference, a pinnacle event in our field, is just around the corner. This year, we are trying to expand the range of research areas within our theme, Promoting Social Responsibility in Educational Research. The Membership Committee has been hard at work developing a new membership flyer, updating our email list of universities and colleges associated with NERA, and making a concerted effort to add new universities and colleges.

The flyer you will receive as an informational email presents "The NERA Advantage," a great space to present, network, be mentored, and learn from timely research. The Membership Committee, in collaboration with the NERA Conference Ambassadors, is diligently preparing for the conference. We will finalize the dates and times for various events, such as the new member breakfast and other networking activities. We also plan to reach out to NERA members before the conference to introduce ourselves. Rest assured, the Membership Committee will be available before and during the conference to answer any questions you may have!

The Membership Committee is eager to hear from you about the benefits of joining NERA beyond just the conference. Your feedback is invaluable to us. We also encourage existing members to renew their membership and invite others—class/cohort mates, colleagues, professors, and former members—to join, attend, and even present at the NERA Convention this October 8–10, 2024, in Trumbull, Connecticut. If you have any questions about membership or the organization, please feel free to contact the Membership Committee (membershipcommittee@nera-education.org) or nera.cochairs@gmail.com.

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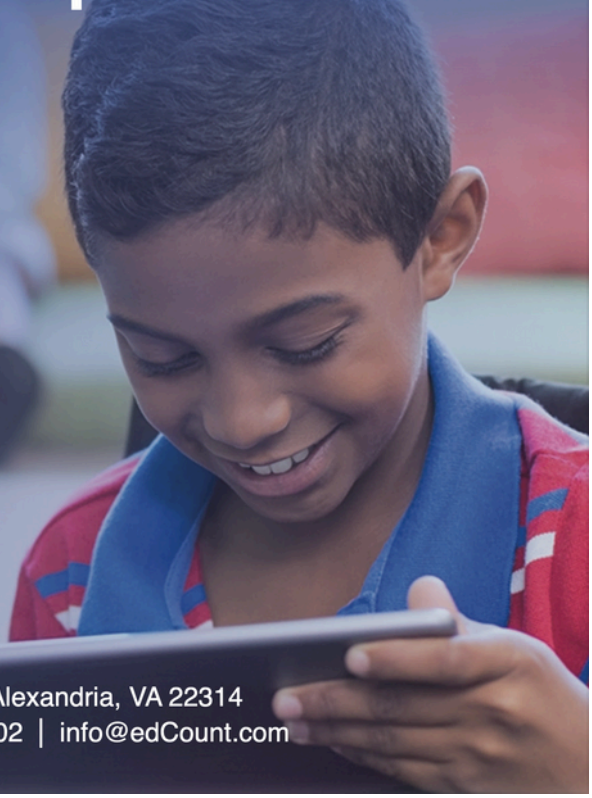

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Member Advocacy Committee Update

Pamela Kaliski, *American Board of Internal Medicine,* Chair

Hello NERA Members!

I hope everyone has gotten off to a great start in 2024! The NERA Member Advocacy Committee is beginning to act on some of the initiatives we shared last year. Here are some highlights of what you can expect:

- For each *NERA Researcher* issue, we plan to highlight a NERA member. However, we don't JUST want to focus on that member as an educational researcher; we want to share a more holistic picture of the featured member (celebration of culture, hobbies, interests, and more). The first, published in the Winter 2024 issue, were: New Member Spotlight (Kat Tremblay) and Seasoned Member Spotlight (Liz Stone). We'd love to highlight YOU!
- We have begun collaborating with GSIC to organize a Webinar in the fall that is focused on preparing for conference presentations. Stay tuned!
- In collaboration with the conference co-chairs,
  - we are planning to have an option during registration to indicate pronouns (in turn, your pronouns will be on your nametags at the conference).
  - more information about local childcare options will be provided.
  - we are looking into other spaces and meetings related to our committee's charge at the conference. Stay tuned.

As a reminder, the charge of the Member Advocacy Committee is to advocate for all of the types of diversity that NERA members represent, with a focus on making NERA members feel included in every aspect of the association. NERA is for everyone, and this committee will help create a safe space that reflects our many layers of diversity. As always, if you have any areas of interest or concern that this committee should consider, please feel free to reach out to us. We are grateful to those of you who have shared thoughts, suggestions, and ideas, and we look forward to listening and learning from you all.

Members of the Member Advocacy Committee:

Tajma Cameron	Maria Hamdani	Thai Ong
Kevin Coopersmith	Sarah Hammami	Kristin Weyrick
Richie Diaz	Samantha Harmon	April Zenisky

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New Member Spotlight

Maura Maxfield (O'Riordan)

(she/her)

Senior Research Fellow
UMass Amherst

Member of *The NERA Researcher* Editorial Board

NERA Member since 2018

LinkedIn

Where do you call home?

Vermont.

What's one of your favorite things about that place/your home?

There are different things to love about all the seasons! Fall has the leaves, winter surprises me with beautiful snowy days and heavy trees, early spring time (mud season) has maple syrup at the sugar shacks, the second spring time gives us blooming flowers, and summer means nights outside and great views of the mountains. Vermont is a pretty nice place to live once you get used to the cold!

Tell us about your family and/or pets!

My family includes my husband, John, our three-year old son, Johnny, and our one-year old daughter, Margot. We also have a boxer named Pippa. The kids and Pippa are always getting into mischief, and it's a lot of fun keeping up with them!

What do you like to do in your free time?

I have recently gotten into gardening. So far (most of) my plants are living and I am so excited to eat some home-grown veggies this summer. I also enjoy reading, playing board games, and running.

Are there any goals you're working toward?

I'm hoping to gear myself up for some running races this summer. I ran cross country through college but haven't raced since, so it sounds fun but nerve-wracking to do so now!

Interested in being considered for our next Member Spotlight? Learn more here!

Seasoned Member Spotlight

Barbara J. Helms, PhD

Educational Research Consultant/Copyeditor

Member of *The NERA Researcher* Editorial Board

NERA Member since 1978

LinkedIn

Where do you call home?

Storrs, CT and Utrecht, The Netherlands

What's one of your favorite things about that place/your home?

In Storrs, we live in a student housing community with a few hundred UConn students. They are amazing and we love living there across the street from campus. In Utrecht, we live in the old part of a medieval university town.

Do you have any favorite family traditions?

Ben and I travel back and forth between the US and the NL for Christmas. When we travel by car, or sometimes in the evening, I read to us from a book about European history that we are both interested in reading.

What's something you enjoy that you think more people should consider doing/learning?

I think people should consider spending some time studying abroad, whether they do a gap year between high school and college or between college and graduate school. The first time I was in Europe was in 1998. I'd finished my PhD, and I did an International Summer School course in History at Cambridge University in the UK. I met so many young people who were studying abroad all over Europe—from the UK to Germany, Spain, and France. It gives people a broadened perspective on people and culture. You don't have to be young necessarily, but it is a great opportunity for young people before they get caught up in getting a job and finding a home, all the things that one does after they finish school.

Do you have any words of wisdom you live by/would like to share?

"*You* are worth it."

Interested in being considered for our next Member Spotlight? Learn more here!

Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service

2024 Call for Nominations:

Thanos Patelis, *JHU & KU*, Chair

The Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award is presented to a longstanding NERA member who exemplifies the qualities that Leo Doherty brought to NERA members, his colleagues, and students throughout his career. The award, instituted by the NERA Board of Directors in 1981, honors the memory of Leo Doherty. He was instrumental in developing and growing NERA as a professional association for educational research.

His leadership qualities, both ethical and humane, encouraged others to pursue and achieve their goals. Thus, it is awarded to NERA members who have exhibited outstanding leadership and service to our organization.

Please nominate a NERA member exemplifying these qualities.

Send a nomination letter in Word or PDF format as an attachment via email to Thanos Patelis (tpatelis@yahoo.com) by **June 30, 2024**. The nomination letter should indicate the name of the nominee, the nominee's e-mail and mailing address, and a concise, compelling indication of the nominee's leadership and service to NERA. Please include input from at least three other NERA members about the nominee's leadership and service either in the nomination letter or separate ones.

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Thomas F. Donlon Award for Distinguished Mentoring

2024 Call for Nominations

Dr. Marcia A. B. Delcourt, *Western Connecticut State University*, Co-Chair
Dr. Samuel F. Fancera, *William Paterson University*, Co-Chair

The Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award for Distinguished Mentoring was established in 2000 in recognition of Tom's long and valued contributions to NERA, particularly as a mentor to so many colleagues. Since then, the award has been presented annually to NERA members who have demonstrated distinction as mentors of colleagues by guiding them and helping them find productive paths toward developing their careers as educational researchers.

Mentoring in education has been going on for centuries, and most of us can name a person who helped us move our careers along by being more than just a friend or colleague. That person may have been an advisor in developing your research agenda or perhaps brought you to NERA for the first time after suggesting that you might be ready for a conference presentation.

Nominations are again being sought for this annual award. Nominees must be NERA members and may be nominated by any member(s) of NERA to whom they served as mentors. If you would like to see a member of NERA who was your mentor be recognized for their contributions to your success, send your nomination, including:

a. A nomination letter
b. Three to five letters of support indicating how the nominee distinguished themself as a mentor.

The award will be presented at the annual NERA conference. Please contact the committee Co-Chairs if you have any questions about the Donlon Award or the nomination process. Send all nomination materials via email to Dr. Marcia A. B. Delcourt (delcourtm@wcsu.edu) or Dr. Samuel F. Fancera (fanceras@wpunj.edu) by June 30, 2024.

Consider how much this award has meant to past recipients and nominate someone to be part of this extraordinary NERA legacy!

Past Awardee:
Dr. Jody Piro, Emeritus Professor, Western Connecticut State University—I was honored to receive the Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award for Mentoring in 2018 for my work in mentorship with doctoral-level educational researchers. Assisting novice researchers in developing a research agenda and conducting, analyzing, and interpreting that research has been a major professional focus for me as a dissertation director. Since that time, I have aspired to encourage discovery learning while also offering substantial support and helping my students to navigate both the theoretical and practical components of their dissertation research, all while maintaining a sense of well-deserved good humor and deep perseverance for the process.

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2023 Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award Winner

2023 NERA Woollatt Award Winner Presents at AERA Conference

Jonathan Steinberg, *EurekaFacts,* NERA President

On April 11, 2024, Dr. Rebecca S. Natow, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy at Hofstra University and winner of NERA's Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award presented her 2023 NERA conference paper, "Higher Education Title IX Coordinators as Policy Actors: Street-Level Bureaucracy and Beyond" at the Consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Association (SRERA) session during the AERA conference in Philadelphia. Rebecca's paper was included with research delivered by representatives from the Mid-South Educational Research Association (MSERA) and the South Carolina Educators for Practical Use of Research (SCEPUR). NERA Mentoring Committee Co-Chair and SRERA Past President Dr. Tabitha Bellamy from the New Jersey Department of Education served as chair for the session. NERA President Jonathan Steinberg was in attendance to introduce Rebecca's paper.

The Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award is named in honor of Lorne H. Woollatt, a distinguished New York State educator and NERA member. It is awarded annually, and a plaque will be given to Rebecca at this October's conference. Communications will be sent out following the 2024 conference for applications and the winner will receive a travel stipend to present their paper at the 2025 AERA conference in Denver. Please contact Rochelle Michel, chair of the committee with any questions at nera.woollatt.award.submission@gmail.com.

Educator-As-Researcher (E-A-R) Committee Report

Marcia A. B. Delcourt, *Western Connecticut State University,* Chair

Committee Members Lisa Bajor, Tajma Cameron, Eduardo Crespo Cruz, Marcia Delcourt (Chair), Salika Lawrence, and Son Pham have been working to enhance the NERA program with an upcoming June Webinar and a Symposium for the October conference:

June 5th Webinar, 4:00-5:00 P.M.
Join us for Dr. Turea Hudson's workshop, ***QuantCrit: A Burgeoning Methodology for Our Ever-Evolving Times.***

Session Description: Quantitative methods are sometimes overlooked by methodologists who recognize the inequities in society and understandably so. Statistical analysis and quantitative methods have historically been used against historically marginalized groups. The weaponization of numbers has caused some researchers to approach quantitative methods with caution. Furthermore, to some researchers, the situation of quantitative methodology in a positivist or post-positivist positionality leaves the methodology vulnerable to centering Western ways of knowing. That does not have to be. The advent of *QuantCrit* and successors like *QuantQueer* allow researchers to explore quantitative research in a new way. They give researchers the framework to explore statistics in a way that infuses critical theories and considers the larger societal structure when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative data.

The purpose of this virtual workshop is to orient researchers to this growing methodology and to inspire them to add it to their methodological toolbox. A brief history of *QuantCrit* will be provided. Subsequently, it will review the tenets of *QuantCrit* and the way these tenets might deviate from the traditional ways of approaching quantitative research. Finally, participants will be offered some scenarios in which *QuantCrit* might be an excellent framework for educational and assessment research. Time will be provided at the end of the workshop for questions and discussion.

October Symposium
A symposium titled *Promoting Community Engagement in Education* is also being planned. Prominent school leaders will share visions and pathways for forging effective school-community partnerships.

E-A-R Award
Remember to submit your nomination for NERA's Educator-As-Researcher Award. Refer to the next page for the call for nominations and the application form.

Educator-As-Researcher (E-A-R) Award

2024 Call for Nominations

Marcia A. B. Delcourt, *Western Connecticut State University*, Chair

The Educator-as-Researcher Award is presented annually to an educator who has conducted a self-initiated classroom research project or applied research findings to inform their own practice. Candidates may nominate themselves or be nominated by a NERA member or other professional who knows about their research. The award recipient will be invited to attend the NERA conference to present the research to a NERA audience and receive the award.

The nominee must be a PK-12 educator who conducted a school-related research project with their students, faculty, local community partners, or constituents to improve educational practices. The project must be conceptualized, developed, and implemented as part of the nominee's context and practices and have had at least one cycle of trial and evaluation. The project should also be related to a clearly defined theoretical focus and represent an innovation that has led to concrete change in educational practice. The research, conducted during the past two years, could be part of a thesis or dissertation if the educator is primarily responsible for the development and implementation of the project. Research topics may vary but should have some importance in the nominee's branch of education. The theory underlying the research, as well as methods of instruction or implementation, data collection, and analysis, should be well articulated and documented by the nominee.

Send the application cover sheet (see next page), and narrative as a Word document to Dr. Marcia A. B. Delcourt, Chair, Educator-as-Researcher Award Committee (delcourtm@wcsu.edu) no later than **June 1, 2024**.

EDUCATOR-AS-RESEARCHER AWARD APPLICATION

55th ANNUAL CONFERENCE, October 2024, Trumbull, CT

Name of Applicant:

_____

Affiliation of Applicant:

_____

Position of Applicant:

_____

Mailing Address of Applicant:

_____

(after June 1, 2024) Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Signature of Applicant: _____ Date: _____

Attach information regarding your submission using the following four guidelines provided:

1. DESCRIPTIVE TITLE OF THE RESEARCH
2. ABSTRACT (Please summarize the research project in no more than 250 words including its purpose, procedure, and outcomes)
3. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH (maximum of 1000 words)
   a. The rationale for conducting the study
   b. Description of project methods including participants, site, and procedures
   c. Report and analysis of research findings
   d. Discussion of the impact of the research on teacher's practices that occurred or will occur as a result of the project
   e. Bibliography of relevant references related to the research
   f. Any other information seen as relevant by the nominee
4. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY TO EDUCATORS (Describe how the results contribute to improved educational practice or professional knowledge of educators in your field; maximum 100 words)

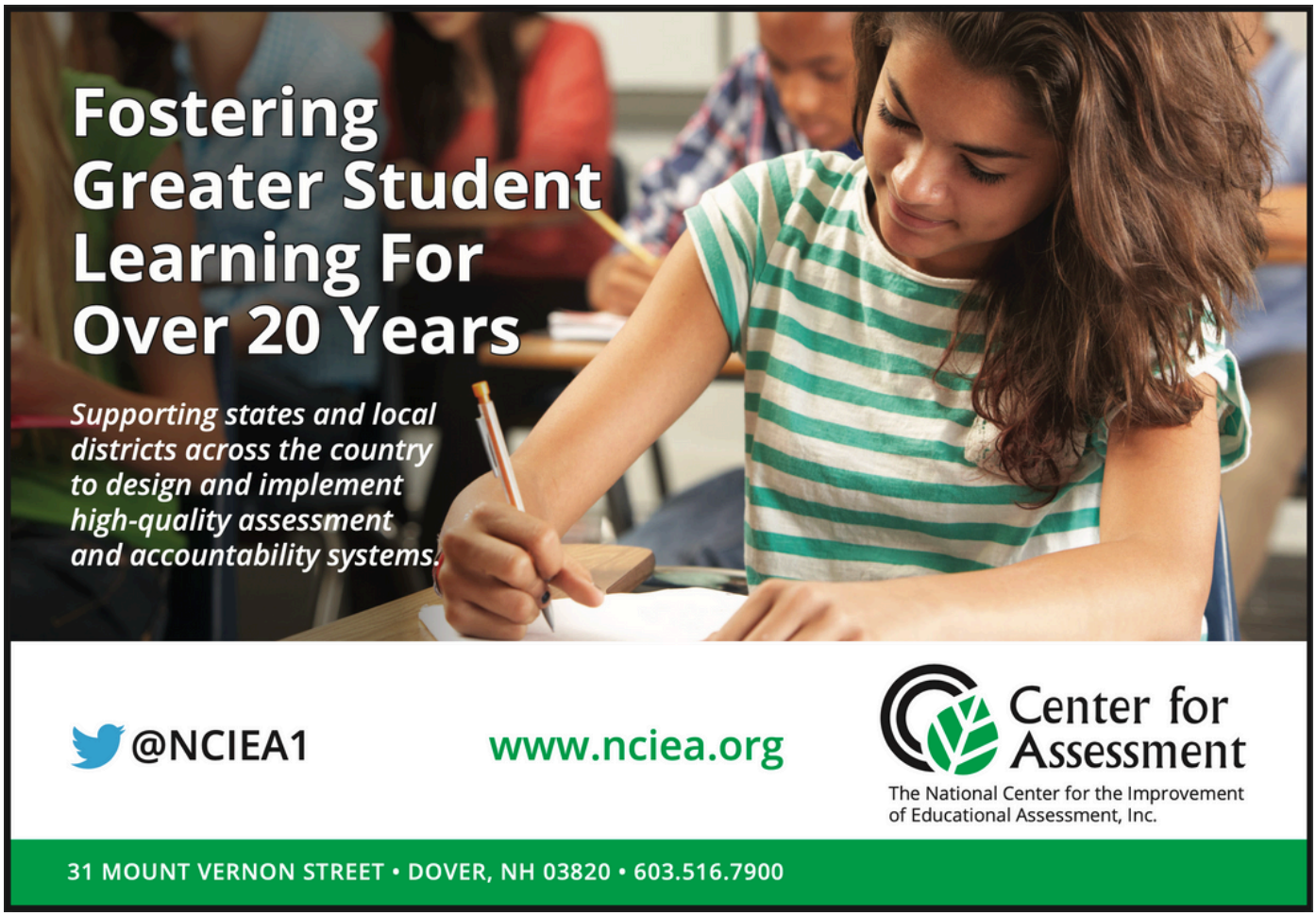
Name of Nominating Person (if other than the applicant): _____

Phone Number: _____ E-mail: _____

Affiliation and Position of Nominating Person (Please Print): _____

Signature of Nominating Person: _____ Date: _____

Send the application cover sheet and narrative as a Word document to: The E-A-R Committee Chair no later than June 1.



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GSIC Report

2023 GSIC Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award

Tricia C. Clarke, *Fordham University,* Chair

One of the most cherished responsibilities of the Graduate Student Issues Committee is facilitating the GSIC Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award. We are thrilled to announce the 2023 winner– Katarina "Kate" Elise Schaefer!

Kate is a second-year Ph.D. student at James Madison University who researches "low-stakes testing on the various influences of student low motivation." Through a double-blind peer review process, Kate's winning paper, *The Influence of Disengagement on the Factor Structure of a Non-Cognitive Measure: Practical Solutions*, received the highest ratings among submissions. Kate's achievement will be further acknowledged at the 2024 NERA Conference with a plaque to commemorate her accomplishment.

Kate has also been actively engaged with NERA for the past four years, currently serving as the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee.

Thank you to all the peer reviewers who thoroughly reviewed and evaluated all papers submitted! A resounding thanks to those students who submitted papers for the 2023 award. Your commitment to educational research is needed, welcomed, and encouraged.

We look forward to your submissions for 2024!

As we advance toward the Fall 2024 NERA Conference, GSIC Committee Members David Earls, Emmanuel College; Rachel Satter, Sacred Heart University; and Matthew Speno, Salem University and Immediate Past GSIC Chair, and I have been intentionally reflecting on the vicissitudes of the graduate school journey with the goal of designing a resource that aims to address the most pressing aspects of this path. The GSIC Committee will unveil this resource at the 2024 NERA Conference and engage graduate students in its contents.

Along with creating a tangible resource, in the coming months, the GSIC will also host a virtual event with recently graduated students who will share their experiences along the master's or doctoral journey. Graduate students are invited to attend this virtual event along with upcoming GSIC meetings and at the 2024 NERA Conference for our annual **GSIC Social!** —an excellent opportunity to interact with peers, network, enjoy refreshments, and exchange ideas. Details will be shared in the future through NERA's communication platforms.

GSIC exists to buoy students through the highs and lows, the ebbs and flows, and the joys and lulls of graduate school through graduation when students are endowed with symbols, sacred in their representation, that mark their achievements and signify that they have stayed (and "slayed") their respective paths through perseverance, endurance–and community. The GSIC is not only here *for* graduate students; we are *with* graduate students along the journey of graduate school as students seek to earn their desired qualifications to signify higher learning. We invite students to join GSIC–members are accepted on a rolling basis–to serve their peers, cultivate relationships, and network with current graduate students and professionals in the field of educational research. For more information, please contact Tricia C. Clarke [tricia.c.clarke@gmail.com].

We look forward to seeing you soon!

Infrastructure Committee Report

Kate Schaefer, *James Madison University,* Chair

Hello NERA members!

I hope that 2024 is going well for you.

This year the Infrastructure Committee has been pleased to recruit two new members who expressed interest in becoming more involved with NERA at least year's conference.

New members Autumn Wild and Mara McFadden (both PhD students at James Madison University) have both contributed to the Infrastructure Committee's goals to maintain accurate and up to date access to internal systems. Our new members will conduct quality control work in the NERA election this fall.

We look forward to upcoming projects such as aiding in the assignment of proposal reviewers for the 2024 NERA Conference and aiding in the facilitation of the NERA elections this fall.

Please feel free to reach out to the Infrastructure Committee if we can assist you in your NERA work. We are always happy to help where needed. I wish you all well and look forward to connecting throughout the year.

Kate Schaefer
Chair, Infrastructure Committee

DIA
Higher Education Collaborators

Mentoring Program Report

Tabitha Bellamy, *New Jersey Department of Education,* Co-Chair

Mentoring Matters

How many times have you as a NERA conference attendee walked past the "Mentoring Happy Hour" without stopping in to see what's going on?

If the answer is more than zero, it is too many. The NERA mentor/mentee program is situated to create lasting professional relationships and build friendships that supersede the annual conference. I began my tenure in the program in 2009, as a PhD student who attended NERA for the first time. After I graduated from the University of Georgia and became somewhat established in my career, I took the first opportunity possible to serve as a NERA mentor.

During the past decade that I have served as a mentor for the organization, I was granted with the exceptional opportunity to serve as a sounding board, career counselor, dissertation coach, big sister, and surrogate mother to various graduate students and new professionals. Over the years, the dynamic has morphed from one of advisor/advisee to friends.

My former mentees and I share life events, professional networking opportunities, presentations, conferences, and the bonds of meaningful friendship.

Mentoring helps create the next generation of strong members of the academy and industry. It allows us all the chance to give into the lives of others as someone has done for us.

This year, when the call for mentors comes out, please answer.

NERA member Tabitha Bellamy, PhD, with former NERA mentees Tanesia Beverly, PhD, and Matthew Madison, PhD

"Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth."

~Shirley Chisolm

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This article is the third in a three-part series on qualitative research terminology, procedures, and positioning. Intended for social science researchers new to the qualitative paradigm, Part III discusses researcher positionality and how the cycle of disclosure, acknowledgment, and reflexivity works in a qualitative project.

Qualitative 101: Researcher Positionality in Qualitative Studies

Felice D. Billups, Ed.D.
Johnson & Wales University

Researcher positionality is a mindset grounded in practice. That practice consists of a series of steps connected by three critical relationships and continuous introspection. Holmes (2020) acknowledges that many researchers find it difficult to identify what positionality is and how to "situate" themselves (p. 1). As Savin-Baden and Major (2023) assert, positionality is a stance "the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" (p. 71).

What is Researcher Positionality?

Rowe (2014) and Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) describe positionality as a practice that directly influences how research is conducted and how the results are shared, placing the researcher in the cultural, political, and social context of the inquiry. Patton (2015), Holmes (2020), and Savin-Baden and Major (2023) extend this definition by identifying three distinct relationships essential to positionality: (1) the researcher's relationship with those being studied (disclosure, bracketing, and epoche), (2) the researcher's relationship with the audience for whom the findings are intended (context sensitivity, researcher role, and access), and (3) the researcher's relationship with self (reflexivity, inherent bias, and insider-outsider status). The intersection of these three relationships forms the basis for the researcher's practice and ensures the viability of a qualitative project. Table 1 displays these relationships as a processual cycle.

Table 1

The Three Relationships of Researcher Positionality

Note. Developed by the author, citing Holmes (2020), Patton (2015), and Savin-Baden & Major (2023).

The subjective and contextual aspects of a researcher's positionality or "situatedness" change over time (Rowe, 2014). Researchers should be aware that their positionality is never entirely fixed and is unique to them (Holmes, 2020). Moreover, positionality statements express how the researcher developed and became the researcher they are, which is a fluid statement for most people (Holmes, 2020). As Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) suggest, the complexity of positionality involves:

> (1) the fluidity of our ever-changing social identities; (2) the abstract, intangible nature of our social identities; (3) the difficulty of knowing which facets of our social identity are more influential over time and place; and (4) how our social identities impact the research process. (p. 3)

Yet, Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) also contend that "despite what is already known about positionality, there is a current gap in the literature for addressing how to help novice critical qualitative researchers practice positionality" (p. 2), leaving researchers with an unclear sense of how to determine their own positions.

Step 1: The Researcher's Relationship with the Studied

The Concept

The question of how to engage, establish trust, and allow for multiple interpretations of participant perspectives comprises the bedrock of good practice in qualitative data collection. A researcher must acknowledge the context of a relationship with participants by disclosing their "position." In other words, the researcher acknowledges their connections with the study by virtue of relevant past experiences and their professional and educational background (Billups, 2020). An explicit stance allows the researcher to equalize the relationship between the researcher and the researched; it also means the researcher should intentionally allow participant views to dominate a discussion until the participant's views surpass what the researcher *thinks* they are hearing or interpreting (Billups, 2020). These disclosure practices make space for the participant's emphases, stories, and perspectives to prevail in all conversations, interactions, and other forms of communication within a study.

This intentional positioning is important for several reasons. In quantitative projects, no relationship forms—nor is meant to form—between the researcher and the researched. Even in instances where the researcher may conduct quantitative interviews with respondents (quantitative designation), the instrument consists of a closed-ended, forced-choice response questionnaire that limits the respondent's answers or commentary. The researcher rarely meets the respondent face to face when the project involves a self-administered survey questionnaire or poll. Similarly, in experiments, the researcher asserts control over the role of the subjects in the study; no evolving or emerging relationships are cultivated intentionally, nor do any emerging relationships form the basis for the study's findings (Patton, 2015).

Yet, as Patton notes, reporting on the exchange with a participant (qualitative designation) "calls for, even demands, a sense of voice and perspective" (p. 66). Qualitative inquiry requires the development and cultivation of a personal relationship in order to support the goals of the research. The qualitative researcher must be empathic, make an emotional connection, and strive to be non-judgmental, always creating a safe space for the participants to express themselves freely. Trust, rapport, and open communication may easily develop between the researcher and participants, but the relationship must go even further (Billups, 2020). It is not enough that the researcher asks the questions, and the participant answers. The researcher is constantly stepping back or standing aside in order to honor and promote the participant's voice. This practice is known as bracketing (Husserl, 1970).

Husserl defines bracketing as the act of uncovering a phenomenon for critical inspection. Bracketing dissects and deconstructs a phenomenon. Rather than accepting what they see or hear at face value, the researcher must explore what lies beneath or behind that phenomenon; Husserl calls this the act of "putting aside." Moustakas (1994) extends Husserl's notion of bracketing by designating the practice as epoche, or the process of "standing back." He explains that the researcher must withhold judgment in order to learn what represents the phenomenon. Like Husserl, Moustakas

describes positioning as bracketing out the world and making space for other perspectives. This suspension of judgment and preconceived notions is the researcher's way of attempting to see the participant's perspective from their viewpoint, known as a phenomenological attitude (Husserl, 1970).

Therefore, epoche or bracketing is a process in which the researcher engages to remove or at least become aware of prejudices, opinions, or assumptions regarding a phenomenon. In all cases, the researcher seeks to become aware of personal bias, eliminate personal involvement with the subject under study, and acknowledge those preconceptions. As scholars suggest, bracketing and epoche are intended to mitigate the effects of the presuppositions that might taint the research (Patton, 2015; Tufford & Newman, 2012), allowing the researcher to develop substantive self-awareness. In this way, the researcher effectively stands back. Yet, while epoche and bracketing differ in their definitions, these concepts are essentially interchangeable in practice (LeVasseur, 2003; Patton, 2015; Shufutinsky, 2020).

In Practice

Despite the overwhelming consensus about the value of disclosing one's position, there is little agreement regarding the methods employed to achieve bracketing and epoche (Shufutinsky, 2020). This persistent gap leaves researchers wondering about the practicalities. Shufutinsky (2020) provides an excellent and detailed "road map" that illustrates the cycle of self-bracketing (i.e., ecliptic self-bracketing, prevention, self-transparency, memoing and journaling, and self-exclusion). Keeping a log or a journal of the researcher's engagement with participants and the research site from the start of the project solidifies this positioning effort.

Many experts recommend recording a journal entry before engaging a participant and then recording impressions immediately after the interaction. These observations, key moments in the discussion, the nonverbal behaviors of all participants, and the researcher's dominant emotions provide a valuable context for interpreting the findings later on. The researcher should acknowledge every detail and decision related to the study, including their reasons for choosing the research problem; their connection with the problem, the field, and the participants; their initial expectations of what they might uncover during the research; their awareness of personal and professional biases about issues or concerns in the field; their struggles with letting participants share stories, practices, assertions that they, as the researcher, may disagree with, or contest; and finally, their emotional and reactive response after every interview or personal exchange to offload their inherent bias and deeply held convictions.

In instances where researchers become participant observers or co-exist with intact groups, their bias may slip toward that of a participant rather than the principal investigator (Elder & Miller, 1995). This shift can confuse the ethics of maintaining boundaries between the two roles; as Wang (2013) observes, the researcher and the participants are motivated to engage one another during the research process, but sometimes extended interactions may negatively affect those relationships. Becoming too close to one's participants challenges the ethical protection of

informants and may strain the researcher's ability to analyze data honestly. In a similar vein, de Laine (2000) calls these inclinations "boundary violations" and cautions qualitative researchers to continuously guard against this, eventually using reflexivity as an effective debriefing intervention (p. 134).

Maintaining a journal of the researcher's role and the boundaries between the researcher and participants is essential. As part of any journaling activity, it is also important for researchers to question themselves regarding ethical concerns that may arise during the research or instances where a participant's privacy may be at risk. Further, a researcher is responsible for acknowledging and addressing the explicit interactions and dynamics with study participants as a way to ensure the transparency and authenticity of the findings. Cypress (2017) suggests that through bracketing, the researcher views the biases, assumptions, and beliefs they might bring to the study; however, this is where the researcher must also be aware that complete reduction is never possible (van Manen, 2016). As van Manen (2016) notes, what we think we know always creeps back into our consciousness.

Although the researcher may bracket their position to a participant at the beginning of a study, they should repeat this positioning several times during data collection. Disclosure, e.g., bracketing or epoche, is not a one-time activity. This continuous disclosure is valuable not only to reassert the distinction between the researcher's interest in the study's focus but also to assert the dominance of the participant's viewpoint. Therefore, as the researcher creates a journal to begin their positioning stance, a strong positionality statement should include:

- A statement or description of the researcher's lenses, beliefs, and values
- Potential influences on the research such as age, gender, intersectionality, identities, career or previous career, social class
- Researcher's chosen or pre-determined position about the participants in the project (as an insider or outsider)
- The research context and an explanation as to how, where, when, and in what way these factors/attributes might influence the research process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2023).

Step 2: The Researcher's Relationship with the Intended Audience

The Concept

A qualitative researcher must establish a working relationship with participants in order to effectively understand their perspectives, behaviors, relationships, processes, outcomes, and knowledge relative to the study's context. If a researcher is not aware of the participant's circumstances and perspectives, they cannot develop rapport or trust … and without those things, participants will not talk candidly or at least not say much of value. This relationship with the study's context, as well as the audience for whom the findings are intended, includes (1) context sensitivity and (2) researcher role and site access.

Context Sensitivity. Context sensitivity requires the researcher to acknowledge and understand the context of the study, the way a participant may perceive that context, and the way the participant may perceive the researcher. It is an intentional strategy that compels the researcher to disclose their own background, familiarity with the research topic, and implicit assumptions about the research topic (Patton, 2015). A researcher may not always be aware of their position since, as humans, we are often unaware of our own prejudices and our relationship with our cultural context.

This "confessional" disposition encourages greater transparency, candor, and disclosure on the part of the participant (Moustakas, 1994). The skills necessary for this practice require a non-judgmental stance, one that is comfortable with listening rather than speaking, with affirming rather than critiquing, and with openness rather than limitations. However, this empathic stance involves more than an acknowledgment of the participant's perspectives. The researcher must attend to the environment in which the participant lives and works, the community where they engage others, and the circumstances that color the way the researcher understands their stories (Day, 2012).

Understanding one's position, "particularly in comparison to the social position of our participants, helps us better understand the power relations imbued in our research," provides an opportunity to be reflexive (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019, p. 2). Thurairajah (2019) discusses the balance between distancing and intimacy in the researcher's relationship with participants—a difficult concept and hard to grasp—regarding whether the boundaries are rigid or permeable. While trust is necessary, it can only be developed where boundaries are permeable and where those boundaries contribute to equalizing power differentials (Thurairajah, 2019).

Finally, being conscious of context ensures that the relationship between researcher and participant is ethical, in which the researcher's social locations and worldview are monitored as they affect the findings (Berger, 2013). Holmes (2020) notes that without attention to context, the researcher may not be able to conduct their research ethically. Societies, cultures, organizations, programs, and families are stratified. Power, resources, and status are distributed differentially. How we sample in the field and then sample again during analysis in deciding who and what to quote involves decisions about whose voices will be heard (Day, 2012).

Researcher Role and Site Access. Concurrently, the qualitative researcher must develop a working relationship with the world or context in which their participants exist in order to conduct the research in situ. In other words, the researcher must seek out those individuals who can provide access to participants, to the research site, or both, who can provide cues to the language or cultural foundation of those participants and can help the researcher interpret the world that participants represent (Billups, 2020). These individuals are known as gatekeepers.

Gatekeepers make it possible for a researcher to enter and become immersed in the research setting, allowing the researcher to probe the context in which the participant exists and develop the relationship. Due to this permitted access to a site, prolonged engagement in the field becomes the primary way for researchers to ensure the dominance of participant perspectives while honoring the context of the study. This time spent in the field leads to important consequences;

the longer you spend with someone, the more their opinions, their views, and their assertions become established as a "truth" and the less weight your own views rank in your understanding (Giorgi, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

In Practice

How do researchers make sense of research findings? Researchers are responsible to their participants to represent their stories with richness and verity. Some scholars eschew this responsibility, claiming that they write only for themselves, but researchers and evaluators should assume weightier social responsibilities. Hertz (1997) clarifies that researchers not only present their findings for peer review but are responsible to those who are impacted. Therefore, researchers should anticipate how their reports will be received and present them in understandable and useful ways.

As the researcher adds to their journal and considers how various audiences will respond to a study's findings, the following questions should be considered:

- How will the intended audience receive the findings?
- What perspectives will they bring to the findings?
- How do the audience's perceptions of the study's orientation and the findings affect the way findings are enacted? (Cialdini, 2001)

Step 3: The Researcher's Relationship with Self

The Concept

One of the primary concerns in qualitative research involves the question of how the researcher jointly constructs meaning with the participants. This question becomes an important issue of procedural transparency and ethical positioning overlapping with other aspects of researcher positionality (Wang, 2013). The distinction between the participant's views and the researcher's views can become blurred if the positioning is not genuine or protected. Understanding oneself, in preparation and for the duration of a study, requires an individual to acknowledge how they and the entire research process may shape how the study is designed and the data are collected, allowing for the researcher's prior assumptions and experience. The researcher's relationship to self, then, is a pathway to emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective (Patton, 2015). Three elements comprise a researcher's relationship with self: (1) reflexivity, (2) inherent bias, and (3) insider-outsider status.

Reflexivity. As Berger (2013) intimates, reflexivity is a researcher-generated activity that ensures quality control in qualitative research through continuous journaling. Reflexivity stresses the ownership of one's perspective; it calls on the researcher to think about one's critical thinking. Further, it requires ongoing self-interpretation and self-exploration that "forms the backdrop" to

the interpretation of qualitative data (Patton, 2015, p. 70). Reflexivity, grounded in the experiential and interpersonal nature of qualitative inquiry, reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports.

Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) define reflexivity "as a set of continuous, collaborative, multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes" (p. 241)—a way to frame and embrace the researcher's subjectivity. Whereas much of quantitative research strives for truths that are as free from bias as possible, qualitative research depends on subjectivity for its value. Notably, however, Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) emphasize that we should not conceive of "reflexivity as an apology for the lack of objectivity in a research project … [and] instead, we conceive of reflexivity as rooted in a respect for and a valuing of subjectivity" (p. 242).

To further emphasize the point, Berger (2013) distinguishes reflexivity from *critical* reflection. While reflexivity is viewed as the process of continual internal dialogue, critical self- evaluation of positionality, as well as active acknowledgment and explicit recognition of this position, may affect the research process and outcomes (Pillow, 2003). One goal of critical self-reflection is to monitor the effects of bias, which enhances the accuracy of research and the credibility of findings by accounting for researcher biases (Berger, 2013). This accounting maintains the ethics of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. By decolonizing the discourse of "other" and ensuring that while the interpretation of findings is achieved through the lens of the researcher, the research process is constantly monitored to limit the detrimental effects of that lens (Berger, 2013).

Beyond critical self-evaluation, reflexivity can be separated from reflection. Being continually reflexive and challenging ourselves to understand and make clear our own underlying perspectives is an important part of the rigor of qualitative research (Barrett et al., 2020). Yet, while reflection and reflexivity are connected, they emphasize different aspects of introspection. Reflexivity encompasses reflection, but it becomes more systematic and probing than might be implied by mere reflection. Reflexivity, as the more expansive practice, challenges the status quo through the constant questioning, reflection, examining, accepting, and articulating of one's attitudes, values, beliefs, biases, and social views and roles (Barrett et al., 2020). Regardless, and in spite of this extensive discourse on the topic, reflexivity remains poorly understood and poorly addressed in the qualitative literature.

Inherent Bias. What is the role of inherent bias in qualitative research? For one thing, researcher positionality and "bias" are natural elements embedded in qualitative research and do not mean that the research itself is somehow invalidated. We are conditioned to believe that bias is a negative aspect of any research study, and that bias somehow distills or dilutes the verity of the research findings. In a qualitative study, however, bias is viewed differently (Billups, 2020).

While there may be concern for undue bias in a study, that type of bias causes apprehension only when it compromises the perspectives of the participants in favor of the researcher's viewpoint. A qualitative study openly and intentionally seeks the unique perspectives of participants, so productive bias, in the best sense, is what makes participant perspectives so valuable (Ahern, 1999; Britten et al., 1995; Giorgi, 1994; Halquist & Musanti, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). The detrimental aspects of bias occur when the researcher either neglects to disclose their own connection to or relationship with the focus of a study or when the researcher lets their own assumptions override the voices of their participants. One way to offset this bias is through disclosure and reflexivity.

Insider-Outsider Status. Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) classify insiders as those who share positionalities or social locations with their participants and are believed to contribute to insider knowledge about the experiences of those they study. Outsiders are categorized as those who do not share the positionalities or social locations of interest with participants and are unable to utilize their own lived experiences to translate or understand the experiences of their participants. In other words, a researcher is considered an "insider" when they share particular attributes with the participants in a study, but a researcher is considered an "outsider" when they do not belong to the group to which those participants belong (Bukamal, 2022). In both cases, it is necessary to determine research methods that are culturally appropriate to the research context and in deference to the research participants. A reflexive diary may alleviate and address insider/outsider positionality considerations (Bukamal, 2022).

According to Easterby-Smith and Malina (1999), insiders' background and knowledge of a research context prepare them to interpret events observed in the research context, whereas outsiders do not have the same ability. The benefits of insiderness include gaining easier access to gatekeepers and participants and reducing the discomfort of the researcher engaging with participants. That stance, however, has its drawbacks, which may include "reduced explanations from participants" regarding questions or context and the "potential blurring of professional boundaries during interactions" (Bukamal, 2022, p. 345). Sometimes, the researcher can be both an insider and an outsider, as the researcher's status may shift back and forth on a continuum. Humphrey (2007) stresses that a researcher is not *either* an insider or an outsider but can exist on that continuum in a stance that shifts even within the same interaction.

Therefore, "the researcher is an active, not a passive, agent in acquiring knowledge of the processes, histories, events, language, and biographies of the research context" (Bukamal, 2022, p. 328). These perspectives need to be made explicit to establish positionality. The researcher observes him or herself in the act of observing, in the act of researching, and in actively acknowledging their status as an insider or outsider or somewhere along that continuum (Bukamal, 2022).

Criticisms of Reflexivity. Some scholars critique the self-indulgent nature of reflexivity and question its value. Patai (2014) suggests that reflexivity does not positively contribute to the research itself, calling the practice self-absorbed and introspective in a detrimental way. Olmas-Vega et al. (2023) cite ongoing criticisms of reflexivity to include an inclination to narcissism, privilege, and the

constant reinforcement of reflexing too much.

Further, Pillow (2003) contends that reflexivity is seen as a way to absolve the researcher of any feelings of guilt because they have seemingly confessed to their biases or preconceptions. Additionally, and like other scholars, Pillow insists that reflexive practices do not lead to better research. To address this implied deficiency, Patai (1994) advocates for "reflexivities of discomfort" where the researcher renders the knowing of themselves to a point where they push boundaries and leave their comfort zones of knowing. They examine questions of power and personalities in a place that is "messy" and less comfortable for the researcher.

The reflexive act, seen in a different light, can contribute to a consciousness about the power in the interactions between the researcher and the researched (Billups, 2020). Berger (2013) argues that while reflexivity can perhaps become self-indulgent, it does allow the researcher to consider the power differentials between participant and researcher. This consideration includes the researcher's examination of how power is perpetuated and challenged during the research process, which is critical to understanding the context of the research. Including focused questions in reflexive journaling may offset the criticisms of reflexivity and create greater awareness of power differentials. For instance, how does the researcher use their position of authority? How does the participant articulate their narratives in spaces where there seems to be a power imbalance? How can the researcher help the participant reclaim their agency in the research space? (Berger, 2013).

In Practice

Self-awareness, even a certain degree of self-analysis, has become a requirement of qualitative inquiry. Scholars agree that being reflexive is critical to the qualitative research process but insist that reflexivity is a process that cannot be rushed (Holmes, 2020). As the reflexive questions below suggest, attention to voice applies not only to intentionality about the voice of the analyst but also to intentionality and consciousness about whose voices and what messages are represented in the stories and interviews that are reported (Holmes, 2020).

As noted above, practicing reflexivity may manifest in a reflexive journal kept throughout the study and in the field (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Ortlipp (2008) posits that "keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity" (p. 695). Written reflections in a journal can clarify research aims and prompt the researcher to ask questions about methods, relationships, access, and research questions, all in an attempt to "bring the unconscious into consciousness and thus open for inspection" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 703).

Journaling may serve as the primary chronicling of the researcher's self-reflection and critical introspection over the course of a study, but memoing is also an important strategy (Ortlipp, 2008; Shufutinsky, 2020). Shufutinsky (2020) defines memoing as that which is "performed during the course of the research interactions, during which the researcher's *self* is used for logistical purposes to document any thoughts, ideas, questions, concerns or needs for expansion or follow-on questions that arise" (p. 54). Similar to journaling, memoing serves as a bracketing exercise,

ensuring that any thoughts or ideas a researcher may have at the moment are recorded and then reviewed later for bias or context; both methods represent the use of self in reflexive practices (Thurairajah, 2019). Regardless, "reflexivity is demonstrated by use of first-person language and provision of a detailed and transparent report of decisions and their rationale" for the journaling process (Berger, 2013, p. 4). Memoing is essentially cryptic note-taking by the researcher and is not intended as part of an ongoing log of self-analysis.

Reflexivity can also be practiced through various techniques (i.e., meditation, presencing, self-reflection, and mindfulness) (Shufutinsky, 2020). In particular, mindfulness is key to helping researchers know what they know; triangulated reflexivity can tie multiple mindfulness practices together (Patton, 2015). To achieve this mindset, Patton (2015) recommends a series of questions that each researcher should consider when adding to their positioning journal:

1. Self-reflexivity. What do I know? How do I know what I know? What shapes and experiences have shaped my perspective? How have my perceptions and my background affected the data I have collected and my analysis of those data? How do I perceive those I have studied? With what voice do I share my perspective? What do I do with what I have found?
2. Reflexivity about those studied. How do those studied know what they know? What shapes and has shaped their worldview? How do they perceive me, the inquirer? Why? How do I know?
3. Reflexivity about the audience. How do those who receive my findings make sense of what I give them? What perspectives do they bring to the findings I offer? How do they perceive me? How do I perceive them? How do these perceptions affect what I report and how I report it?

Additionally, as researchers seek to engage with socially and historically marginalized participants, Olukotun et al. (2021) recommend additional journal questions to consider:

- What biases do I have regarding my research participants?
- What historical, social, cultural, and political factors shape the experiences of my research participants?
- What strategies can I employ to center my participants' authentic experiences?
- What issues centered around researcher positionality can I preemptively address? (Olukotun et al., 2021, p. 1423)

Overall, the research literature provides very little guidance about the use of reflective journals and their purposes, how to keep one from a methodological perspective, or even how to use the reflections as an integral part of the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). For examples of qualitative writings centered on illuminating issues of reflexivity and voice, Hertz (1997) provides an excellent overview, as does Patton (2015). Of particular value, though, is Shufutinsky's (2020) explanation of the reflexive memoing and the journaling process, including autoethnography and self-transparency (audit trails) as part of the exercise.

In summary, numerous scholars acknowledge the triumvirate which constitutes research positionality in qualitative inquiry (Ahern, 1999; Barrett et al., 2020; Holmes, 2020; Nagata, 2006; Patton, 2015; Rowe, 2014; Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). To situate oneself with participants, within the research context, and with oneself reflexively is to engage in critical self-questioning and self-analysis. As Berger (2013) reminds us, "the researcher's position may be fluid rather than static … researchers must continually ask themselves where they are at any given moment in relation to what they study" (p. 13).

Conclusion

Researcher positionality depends on the cultivation of many relationships. The practice of positioning enables the researcher to engage those being studied, to acknowledge the context for their stories, and to juxtapose one's own beliefs, biases, and values. Those perspectives are key to elevating a qualitative study from mere words to rich, meaningful stories. Those stories remain at the heart of every qualitative project.

The elements that comprise positionality are presented as a continuous cycle; however, the start and end points are negotiable. Most researchers begin a project with an initial reflexive journal entry, noting their initial impressions, concerns, and self-reflections. Those reflexive notes form the basis for the disclosure statement that the researcher offers to the participants in their first exchange. In some cases, however, the researcher might begin the project by engaging the intended audience or gatekeepers. Regardless of the sequence of steps, the cycle continues unabated through the duration of the study.

One important thing to note is that positioning activities do not constitute data collection. The reflexive journal and the conscious statement of disclosure serve to frame the researcher's interpretation of the study's findings, but they are not included in the actual findings. Instead, the researcher should ask a fundamental question: Does one's positionality allow the study's findings to represent the voices of participants without dilution? Malterud (2001) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) remind us that there is no way to escape the world in which we live, particularly in those instances where we study that world. In the end, researcher positionality constitutes the ultimate quality control activity in a qualitative project and ensures that the voices of all—the researcher as well as the researched—are honored and heard.

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