

FEATURE ARTICLE

#ResearchYen: Do It 'Til You Make It

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Introduction

“Who am I as a researcher?” This is a deceptively simple yet deeply challenging question. Reflexivity requires not only looking back on one's experiences but also interrogating how these experiences, identities, and positionalities shape the way we approach research (Berger, 2015; McIntosh, 2023; Yip, 2024). As a nurse academic navigating the complex world of research, I hesitate to fully claim the identity of a “researcher.” Instead, I see myself as being in constant formation, much like Patricia Benner's (1984) Novice to Expert continuum in nursing practice. I locate myself as an advanced beginner in research: someone who possesses conceptual understanding and emerging competencies but continues to grapple with the complexities of qualitative inquiry, scholarly writing, and knowledge production (Birnbau, 2025).

In this paper, I critically reflect on my journey as a researcher, tracing experiences from undergraduate and graduate school, professional practice, and current doctoral training. Reflexivity allows me to acknowledge my positionality, strengths, struggles, and aspirations as I “do it scared” and “fake it until I make it.” Through this reflexive exercise, I recognize that my identity as a researcher is not fixed but evolving, constructed through experiences of both success and struggle, and driven by resilience, determination, and passion for lifelong learning (Sibbald et al., 2024).

Early Encounters with Research: Team Player in Formation

My earliest encounter with research was during my undergraduate thesis on the socioeconomic status and academic performance of nursing students. It was a team project, where I experienced firsthand the collaborative and sometimes chaotic process of data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation. Though I barely remember the

methodological specifics, what stands out is the importance of teamwork and collective accountability. Research was not the product of one brilliant individual but of a group negotiating strengths and weaknesses toward a shared goal.

This resonates with the social constructivist view of research, where knowledge is co-produced through interaction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a student researcher, I learned that my role was not to “master” research but to contribute as a dependable team player. This early experience established a foundation of collaboration that continues to inform my current research practice, especially as I mentor and advise undergraduate thesis groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Graduate School: Diligence and Resourcefulness

In 2011, I completed my master's degree, conducting a quantitative study on nursing students' classroom behavior. Being a part-time graduate student juggling professional and personal responsibilities, I relied heavily on diligence and resourcefulness. Adopting an existing questionnaire facilitated smoother implementation, while exposing me to the labor invested by scholars in instrument development and validation.

While the study may not have achieved the rigor I now aspire to, it marked an important steppingstone in my research journey. Quantitative designs felt safer and more structured, allowing me to sharpen technical skills such as sampling, statistical analysis, and interpretation. Yet, this experience also revealed the limitations of relying solely on numbers, an awareness that prepared me for later encounters with qualitative approaches. As Polit and Beck (2020) argue, both quantitative and qualitative paradigms are essential, each offering distinct yet complementary ways of understanding nursing phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

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Research Coordinator and Educator: Passionate and Committed

My appointment as Research Coordinator and later as a research teacher placed me at the heart of research culture in my college. For more than a decade, I advised and evaluated student theses, facilitated research trainings, and coordinated institutional projects. This professional responsibility required me to continuously “fill my cup” through reading, attending conferences, and updating my knowledge of research methodologies.

These roles cultivated passion and commitment. Reflexivity makes me realize that passion alone does not make one a competent researcher, but it sustains perseverance amidst difficulties. My work also underscores the recursive nature of teaching and research. As I guided students, I too learned from their perspectives, struggles, and questions, reinforcing the idea that research is a lifelong learning process (Birnbaum, 2025).

Funded Research and the Struggle with Qualitative Inquiry

To date, I have completed two institutionally funded quantitative studies. Numbers have always appealed to me for their sense of order and structure. However, my encounters with qualitative research exposed vulnerabilities. I found long interviews and narrative writing intimidating, often doubting whether I was capturing participants' experiences authentically.

One memorable project on the health status and lifestyle of fisherfolk communities required me to conduct structured interviews. Beyond answers, participants shared emotions and lived realities. This highlighted the essence of qualitative research: its ability to give voice to experiences often silenced in statistics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Despite my insecurities, the process revealed that flexibility and openness to discomfort are essential. Being a “risk-taker” in research means stepping outside methodological comfort zones. Reflexivity here means acknowledging both my apprehensions and the transformative potential of engaging deeply with participants' stories (Sibbald et al., 2024; McIntosh, 2023).

Learning Through Experience: Open-Minded and Teachable

“Experience is the best teacher.” Defending proposals, revising manuscripts, preparing budgets, and navigating administrative requirements have all deepened my research

skills. Failures and corrections sharpened my attention to detail and appreciation for ethical rigor. More importantly, these experiences fostered humility. I recognize that no matter how much I know, there is always more to learn, unlearn, and relearn (Birnbaum, 2025).

As reflexivity scholars argue, acknowledging our limitations does not weaken our researcher identity; it strengthens it by making us accountable to the knowledge we produce (Berger, 2015). By remaining open-minded and teachable, I continue to grow as both a learner and mentor in research.

Current and Future Directions: Determined and Purposeful

At present, I am pursuing doctoral studies while working on proposals related to type 2 diabetes, wellness of university employees, and possibly personal projects on aging and widowhood. These ideas reflect my conviction that research should be meaningful—not only fulfilling academic requirements but addressing health and social issues that matter to people's lives.

My aspirations to publish, contribute to policy, and make a difference are grounded in the recognition that research is both personal and political. As a nurse-researcher, my positionality is shaped by my gender, profession, and life experiences. This reflexivity challenges me to harness these positionalities not as barriers but as lenses for more nuanced, socially responsive scholarship (Yip, 2024).

Determination drives me forward. As I often remind myself: “Do it scared.” Even in the face of doubts, persistence keeps me moving along the novice-to-expert continuum.

Synthesis: Who Am I as a Researcher?

Reflecting on my journey, I identify myself as a team player, diligent, resourceful, flexible, open-minded, teachable, determined, and passionate about lifelong learning. But more importantly, I acknowledge that these traits are situated in an evolving identity shaped by contexts, responsibilities, and positionalities.

In summary, I see myself as a researcher who is:

Resilient in navigating challenges and setbacks
Enthusiastic about pursuing relevant and meaningful topics
Noteworthy in aspiring to make a difference in health and society

Adept at building and refining research competencies
 Learning continuously through teaching, mentoring,
 and practice
 Yearning for more research engagements and
 opportunities
 Navigating my journey toward expertise with humility
 and determination

This acrostic of “RENALYN” captures both my personal identity and scholarly aspirations.

Conclusion

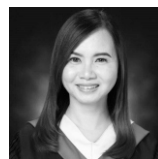
Who am I as a researcher? I am a scholar-in-progress, resilient, determined, and passionate, yet still navigating uncertainties and learning curves. Reflexivity enables me to embrace both my strengths and limitations, positioning myself not as a finished “expert” but as an evolving practitioner of inquiry. Guided by Benner’s Novice to Expert theory, I recognize that expertise is not a destination but a journey of continual practice, reflection, and transformation (Benner, 1984; Birnbaum, 2025).

Ultimately, my research identity is one of persistence: to do it until I make it. Through diligence, humility, and commitment to justice-oriented and socially responsive scholarship, I aspire to contribute meaningfully to nursing and to the communities I serve.

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