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### Report

## 15th Qualitative Methods Conference, 3–5 May 2016, Glasgow, United Kingdom

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The Qualitative Methods Conference, hosted annually by the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology (IIQM), was a 3-day event focusing on qualitative research across disciplines. The theme of the conference, *Collaboration Considered: Complexities and Possibilities Across Communities and Cultures*, invited presentations and discussions around the challenges and benefits of conducting research collaboratively—as well as providing a platform for new perspectives on research approaches to emerge across disciplinary, geographical, and cultural boundaries. According to Sarah Stahlke, the conference chair, the conference programme sought to reflect “the diversity of approaches being used across disciplines and the experiences of a vast array of researchers.” The picturesque city of Glasgow, Scotland, flaunted cold but uncharacteristically dry weather providing a perfect venue for a conference that sought to generate dialogue on complexities and possibilities.

The opening keynote address by Jean Clandinin, professor and founding director of the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta, titled “Relational Commitments of Narrative Inquirers” stimulated thinking about relational ethics in qualitative research. Her presentation took the audience on an autobiographical narrative journey reflecting on her lengthy engagement with a young girl from an impoverished Indigenous community. As her story unfolded, we began to learn about the shifting positioning—and repositioning—of the researcher and young girl in relation to each other and to their emerging relationship over the months and years of the engagement. This was a thought-provoking start to the conference, reminding delegates that research is a relational process of becoming for both the researcher and participant, and encouraging fellow researchers to be mindful of how their engagements can become part of the participants’ lives.

The second keynote address was presented on the final day of the conference by Penny Tinkler, a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Manchester, who has written extensively on photo-methods and visual culture. Her presentation, “Building Bridges and Bridging Time: Photo-Elicitation as Collaborative Practice,” spoke to issues of both implicit and explicit collaboration, highlighting the important difference between participation and collaboration. She further argued that collaborative microprocesses, when designed into the research engagement, help build bridges with participants and are key to the success of photo-elicitation interviews. What stood out was her discussion that carefully planning and thinking about such microprocesses can contribute towards rigour and quality in visual research.

Three micro keynote addresses had been selected from all submitted abstracts for their innovative or intriguing contribution, and were presented in a plenary format. Victoria Palmer, Senior Research

Fellow at the University of Melbourne, spoke about an interdisciplinary, qualitative approach informed by theories of ethics and narrative examining primary health care, severe mental illness, and recovery. She was followed by Suzanne Goopy, a cultural and visual anthropologist and professor of community health at University of Calgary, speaking about using cultural probes in focus groups to enable empathic, engaging, and emancipatory research. The final speaker, Louela Manankil-Rankin from Nipissing University, rounded up the panel by outlining an innovative process of data analysis in narrative inquiry.

The conference did not feature set thematic tracks but each day delegates could move between seven concurrent sessions representing a variety of topics. The range of morning and afternoon sessions featured topics such as:

- Specialised methodologies (e.g., case studies, action research, longitudinal research, interpretive phenomenology, ethnographic approaches)
- Research skills (e.g., approaches to analysis, reflexive practice, data collection challenges, innovative data generation, using art)
- Collaborations with specialised or marginalised groups (e.g., vulnerability and giving voice, sampling vulnerable populations, stories and histories, indigenous and race)
- Sessions focused on current issues in qualitative research (e.g., communication and interaction, focus on results, fostering change, collaboration and engagement in action, research as intervention, ethical challenges, promoting knowledge translation).

Unfortunately, it was not always clear how presentations were grouped together or, at times, how they related to that themed session. Further, with seven concurrent tracks featuring similar topics or themes there was limited opportunity to attend sessions of interest, which often clashed. Each day featured 10 poster presentations that could be viewed during tea and lunch breaks. Although the majority of posters focused on issues of community health, nursing, and palliative care or rehabilitation, the ones that caught my attention focused on studies demonstrating the need for respecting children's voices in research, using photos to give voice to low-income seniors, using drama and film to translate data analysis results, and an interesting study from La Trobe University, Australia, on a methodology of change for community participation in improving rural health outcomes.

This year's conference also included three new innovative forums for short presentations and discussions. A Q-Talk, modelled on the popular TED Talks format, was presented by Shona Hilton on using qualitative research to inform public and policy debates. She started her talk by asking for a show of hands of how many audience members believed that they were engaged in research that could inform policy and influence public debate. As several hands shot up, she then asked how many could say that their work had in fact influenced policy or public debate—and the majority of hands dropped. What followed was an interesting review of the challenges faced by researchers to produce current, relevant, and socially transformative research and the slow process of public discourse. "Discovery Spaces" provided in-depth sessions and discussions on six specialised research methods: analytic saturation by Jude Spiers, grounded theory by Kay Currie, critical realism by Alex Clark, interpretive description by Sally Thorne, meta-synthesis by David Nicholas, and institutional ethnography by Janet Rankin. The Café Q session, on the other hand, offered a more informal format for delegates to select small groups in which to discuss and debate on specific issues, trends, and challenges related with collaboration in research.

I believe that the conference succeeded in providing an enlightening, enriching, and engaging forum for sharing ideas and networking with a considerable group of qualitative researchers seeking meaningful ways to improve collaborative research engagements. However, because presentations and posters from the health sciences still dominated, it was not quite a convergence of an interdisciplinary community of researchers. Most importantly, and perhaps due to being a researcher from South Africa, I was acutely aware of the shortage of fellow researchers and studies representing the African continent or other developing countries, as well as the limited space afforded for discussions on emerging indigenous methodologies in qualitative research. While the theme is yet to be announced, the 16th Qualitative Methods Conference will convene next year in Banff, Canada, and promises to once again be a highlight in the community of qualitative researchers.