

## **A Call to Action: The First International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry**

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Around the globe governments are attempting to regulate interpretive inquiry by enforcing biomedical, evidence-based models of research. These regulatory activities raise basic philosophical, epistemological, political and pedagogical issues for scholarship and freedom of speech in the academy. Their effects are interdisciplinary. They cut across the fields of educational and policy research, the humanities, communications, health and social science, social welfare, business and law.

(Denzin, 2005a)

The First International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from May 5-7, 2005, was assembled so that the international community of qualitative researchers could address the implications of attempts by federal funding agencies to “regulate scientific inquiry by defining what is good science” (Denzin, 2005b). The Congress was attended by more than 800 persons from more than 45 nations. More than 160 sessions consisting of more than 650 papers authored by more than 750 persons were presented. The complete Congress program, including session and paper abstracts, complete papers, and other information is available at <http://www.qi2005.org/>.

JMDE visited the conference to learn more about the ongoing debate regarding evidence-based science and policy and cutting-edge qualitative methodologies. Following are brief overviews of Congress panels and sessions attended.

## **Opening Keynote Addresses**

There were two opening keynote addresses introduced by Norman K. Denzin. The first of these was Janice Morse's "The Politics of Evidence." As Morse (2005) argued "evidence, by definition is definite, hard, indisputable, unchanging" and "yet, what counts as evidence, what we are willing to consider as evidence, and, most importantly, what we are willing to consider constitutes evidence, is fickle, irrational, and arbitrary." She went on to explain that the "criteria for defining evidence and the means by which it is accrued, is selected by passive agreement, often unchallenged, and supported by mainstream academia, policy makers and government" (Morse, 2005). For evidence-based research, the Cochran criterion has long been the standard for what is applicable and acceptable in research, resulting in the exclusion of qualitative research from funding. Morse then explained how the qualitative community responded throughout the years. Key strategies included for example appeals, the development of qualitative meta-analysis, and mixed methods approaches that demonstrate efficacy by using logic and common sense. Furthermore, Morse presented alternative methodologies including: (i) forensic designs for cases in which "near misses" are investigated, that is, the incident under investigation has not yet occurred and outcomes are hypothetical, thus, the converse to statistical significance and devoid of quantitative criteria; (ii) trials of interventions, that is, microanalysis of rare events that are experimental, but where outcomes are unknown; (iii) observations and precise micro-analytic observational descriptions, and (iv) simulations of high risk situations.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith presented the second keynote address, “On Tricky Ground: Researching the Native in the Age of Uncertainty,” in the form of stories from her own and other’s experiences. Smith illustrated the ‘tricky ground’ that fills the spaces “between research methodologies, ethical principles, institutional regulations and human subjects as individuals and as socially organized actors and communities” (Smith, 2005). She further asserted that “this ground is richly nuanced in terms of diverse interests through epistemological challenges to research, to its paradigms, practices and impacts” and “in this context—building on what indigenous communities have struggled for, tried to assert and have achieved—what is possible in the application of indigenous perspectives that examine the intersections of methods, ethics, institutions and communities” (Smith, 2005).

## **Plenary Sessions**

### ***Science, Etc.: From Bicycle Helmets to Dialogue Across Differences***

*Chair:* Elizabeth St. Pierre

*Panelists:* Michael J. Feuer, Lisa Towne, and Elizabeth St. Pierre

This plenary session was a friendly debate between Michael Feuer of the National Academy of Science (NAS) and Elizabeth St. Pierre of the University of Georgia.

Feuer started out the presentation by providing a brief description of the development and history of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council and then devoted considerable time to defending the NAS and NRC in guiding and informing the federal government in “science policy” and “science-based policy.” Feuer claimed that science is only objective and independent if it is not paid for. Therefore, both the NRC and the NAS are independent of the government and must, if called for advice, be “faithful” to data,

to evidence. Interdisciplinary committees are invited to engage in a process of evidence-based consensus building which is to affect federal law and policy decision making. Keys to decision making include appreciation and understanding of standards of evidence as well as the appropriateness of the level of evidence, which if set to high, thwarts decision making.

The diversity of interests considered is reflected in reports published by the National Academy Press (see <http://www.nap.edu>). One NRC report specifically referred to “Advancing scientific research in education” (see executive summary [http://www.nap.edu/execsumm\\_pdf/11112.pdf](http://www.nap.edu/execsumm_pdf/11112.pdf)) and was build on the report on “Scientific research in education” which defined what “high-quality scientific inquiry” is or should be (see executive summary [http://www.nap.edu/execsumm\\_pdf/11112.pdf](http://www.nap.edu/execsumm_pdf/11112.pdf)).

St. Pierre was introduced as the “extreme postmodernist” and started out by referencing well-known postmodern theorists including Jacque Derrida, Judith Buttler, and Michael Foucoult. St. Pierre found the NRC report offensive and stated that the government is “narrowing science” and “the current definition of science is grounded in positivism.” She also claimed that “science is not the same in all paradigms in terms of ontology, epistemology, and methodology” and that “the rage of causation is nothing more than an attempt at meaning making.” Evidence-based research was not only pointed out to being “dangerous” because it narrows science but because it is based on power, politics, and economy. St. Pierre emphasized that it is essential to consider epistemologies in science to understand the limitations research. For example, science could not capture lived reality; instead it is everywhere, does not have an identity, and is always in the making.

***Monsters of Evidence: Qualitative Research and the Globalization of Audit Culture***

*Chair:* Patti Lather

*Panelists:* Patti Lather, Lis Hojgaard, Dorte Marie Sondergaard, Ian Stronach, Harry Torrance, and Phil Hodkinson

In this session, presenters from Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the United States reflected on evidence-based research under different cultural traditions. The Scandinavian presenters described the arrival of evidence-based research in Scandinavia and called for elaboration and redefinition of the term “evidence.” Evidence-based research is perceived as one single method, which not only limits the questions asked but also the answers elucidated, thus leading to a knowledge gap.

Stronach focused on the gap between rules/regulations and reality, leading to circularity and suppressed nucleation of research, the “either/or;” while Torrance discussed the shift in locus of control, questioning who defines and controls research in society. Torrance claimed that the managerial audit culture hurts the quality of research, which is evaluated and judged based on its management rather than on its intrinsic value.

Hodkinson discussed the return of positivism, specifically in the United States with regard to educational research. He pointed out that learning is a contested social construct and that acquisition views dominate learning. However, acquisition perspectives view learning as an outcome, leading to the neglect of the learning process. Moreover, evidence-based research would only view measurable outcomes as significant. The application of post-positivist objectives to learning would result in the following paradox issues: (i) there is no independent variable,

(ii) noise matters, and (iii) objectivity is biased. Evidence-based research would not include the methods that bring truth.

***‘Scientifically Based Research’ and Qualitative Research Methodologies***

*Chair:* Katherine Ryan

*Panelists:* Yvonna S. Lincoln, Earnest House, Julianne Cheek, Frederick Erickson, Nicholas Burbules, and Ian Stronach

Each of the presentations in this plenary session focused on differing aspects of scientifically based research and qualitative methodologies.

Burbules attempted to look “Beyond Method,” and emphasized that researchers need to clarify (i) value propositions, (ii) the field they are from including outspoken critics of that field, and to accept (iii) consequences of their research. This includes an understanding of cultures of inquiry and epistemological virtues. Epistemological virtues involve intellectual and moral qualities. For example, tolerance of alternative methodological and ethical approaches to research are the underlying necessities for objectivity. Fallibalism on the other hand, is the virtue that researchers leave room for failure and admit it when they experience it, thus, fallibalism functions as a change initiator and agent. Questions posted at the end included: where do epistemological questions come from? What good are methods without epistemological virtues? And how do epistemological virtues generate debates?

Katherine Ryan’s presentation emphasized the old and new scientism and argued that “evidence is not evident.” Moreover, she asserted that the reemergence of positivism can be attributed to the audit culture.

Lincoln discussed qualitative methodology and social justice. She illuminated five recent trends in the social science community: (1) there is more openness regarding social justice, (2) qualitative methods are deployed to collect the construction of marginal groups, (3) there is willingness to utilize opinions of marginal groups to pose research questions, planning, and conducting research, (4) there are active advocates for the poor and other marginal groups, and (5) false neutrality is abandoned. Moreover, Lincoln provided three suggestions regarding the qualitative/quantitative debate: (i) be available to discuss and be tolerant of different and alternative methodologies, (ii) senior staff should team up with junior staff to thwart anxiety of doing qualitative research prior to tenure, and (iii) colonize them.

House provided an overview of 40 years of (policy) evaluation and pointed out developments in the perception of causation, from regularity based causation to complexity of causation. Moreover he constructed an analogy in the current evidence-based debate to the existing neo-fundamentalism prevalent in the United States. The golden standard for causation provides researchers with only one source of truth that is described Campbell and Stanley. Therefore, research is limited in accessibility, prophetic in its vision about the future, and closed to other ideas. Moreover, the fundamentalism is marked by listening to only those who share the same ideas, by rejecting others, and by persuasion through coercion. The methodological fundamentalism would be marked by blacklisting those who can(not) do research, by a shift from the Cochran to the Campbell regime, and by not listening to others.

## **Special Featured Panels**

### ***Why Measurement Fails***

*Presenters:* Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein

Does measurement fail? Gubrium and Holstein suggest that it does. In fact, the presenters argued that (1) measurement can't capture interactions, (2) freezes context, (3) reifies meaning, and (4) requires fixed variables. Grounded in the sociological literature (e.g., Mayhew, Znaniecki, Whyte, Cicourel, and Rose, among others) and exemplified through discourse analysis of court conversations, the authors assert that the issue of measurement's failures needs to be revisited because the concerns have not been resolved, that we live in a "measurement society," in which applied concerns ignore the issue of the seriousness of empirical reality. Their most compelling argument, however, was that measurement fails to account for differing meaning for different groups of persons and does little to account for context, which is defined differently for qualitative and quantitative researchers.

## **General Sessions**

### ***Mixed and Mixed-Up Methods***

*Chair:* Ian E. Baptiste

*Presenters:* Ian E. Baptistse, Ljiljana Vuletic, Michel Ferrari, Marina Micari, Susanna Calkins, Melissa Luna, Greg Light, and C. Mimi Harvey

Unfortunately, only three of the eight presenters showed-up for this session; Ian E. Baptiste, Marina Micari, and Susanna Calkins. Baptiste's paper titled "Mixed and Mixed-Up Methods: Reconceptualizing Mixed-Methods Design" was an expose on what "constitutes a method." That is, the author argued that a procedure qualifies

as a method once it incorporates some strategy or strategies for collecting words or numbers and that words are qualitative whereas numbers are quantitative. Moreover, Baptiste argued that research has four analytic interests, each with corresponding methods. These were:

1. Identify and measures associations—with the corresponding methods being correlational studies and quasi-experiments
2. Explore phenomena—with the corresponding methods being qualitative research methods
3. Establish cause—with the primary methods being experiments and quasi-experiments
4. Describe frequency distributions—with the corresponding method being surveys

Micari and Calkins presented “Achieving Accountability in Education: Phenomenography as Research-Based Evaluation,” in which they described an evaluation which employed phenomenography in addition to a variety of other methods to evaluate an education program. Phenomenography was described as “the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which we experience, conceptualize, perceive, or apprehend various phenomena.”

### ***IRBs and the Politics of Informed Consent***

*Chair:* Gaile S. Cannella

*Presenters:* R. Wiles, G. Crow, S. Heath, V. Charles, Stephen J. Sills, Bart W.

Miles, Amy E. Blank, Barbara F. Sharf, M. Carolyn Clark, and Marco Marzano

Wiles, Crow, Heath, and Charles presented “Research Ethics and Regulations in the UK: The Case of Informed Consent.” The authors conducted research of

researchers regarding the increased enforcement of regulated informed consent in the UK, and how their subjects positioned themselves in relation to these issues.

Sills and Miles discussed their study “Investigating Visual Researchers’ Experiences with Institutional Review Boards.” The authors conducted survey research with qualitative, visual researchers in academic institutions and found that researchers’ experiences with IRBs varied widely in terms of perceived quality and satisfaction with the IRB process.

Blank, a doctoral student in a traditionally quantitative department, discussed the process of attaining IRB approval for her dissertation research in “The IRB’s Role in Ethnography of Vulnerable Populations: Protection of the Subject or Protection of the Paradigm?”

“The Dark Side of Truth(s): Ethical Quandries in Accessing and Reporting Qualitative Analysis of Life Stories” presented by Sharf and Clark discussed their research in female prison populations. The authors presented a number of difficulties in their research as it related to ethics and IRBs. Primarily, the authors struggled with their research subjects revealing information with the portent for creating ethical dilemmas. Furthermore, the authors argued that IRBs do not meet the needs of qualitative researchers and are stuck in the positivist, medical model frame of mind regarding ethics and research.

Marzano discussed “Towards Ethical Globalization? Freedom of Research and Moral Constraints in Qualitative Research,” in which he shared his experiences conducting ethnographic research in a hospital. This research required that the researcher “go undercover,” that is, he dressed and acted as a medical professional in order to conduct research on medical professionals.

## **The Second International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry**

The Second International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry is scheduled to take place from May 4-7, 2006 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Additional information is available at <http://www.c4qi.org/qi2006.html>.

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