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Twisting, Turning, Folding, and Recreating the Notion of Collaboration in Qualitative Research ... Through an Artistic Lens

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This is a rich, provocative, and reflective volume of 11 articles exploring the concerns of collaboration in qualitative research. Each individual piece brings a new and different angle on the topic, and, as a whole, they create a jagged composite like some kind of newly mined ore. The approach the authors bring to the topic of collaboration in qualitative research is fresh and often startling. This work takes us beyond initial tentative questions about collaboration and qualitative research and into the next stage of working through the possibilities.

A double-hinged volume--the first part (five articles), focuses us on the ways collaboration has expanded methodological perspectives in qualitative research. While the second part (six

articles), delves specifically into how the arts are a means of understanding collaboration from the perspective of qualitative research methodology. The role of the arts is explicit in Part II, but implicit throughout the volume. Without the implicit guidance of the arts in regard to textual representation, improvisation, visual evidence and many other areas that figure here, the volume could not have existed as it is.

This volume demonstrates so profoundly what discussions of the paradigms raise in my qualitative research classes year after year, and this is if you make a change in one aspect of a paradigm—from views toward reality, methods, representation, etc.-- that the changes ripple out into all of the other arenas defined by the paradigm. In the same way, the writers in this volume demonstrate how changing the relationship to co-authors, participants, communities, etc. shifts the conduct of the research in multiple ways from process to product.

In keeping with its focus—collaboration and qualitative research methodology—this volume is heavy with process. The authors are writing about issues and concerns that haven't yet been solidified in tradition and form, and this requires that they undress for us, taking off their protective armor and outer garments of methodological rhetoric. It is critical that we, as readers, view the design of the garments that were protected by the methodological armor, touch the fabric, and consider how the drape was achieved.

Derobing is a risk, in any situation, and these authors take real risks in the exploration of their topics. The risks came in the rejection of traditions in genre, roles of participant versus researcher, deconstructing student and teacher, and crossing out of the domain of social science into the world of the arts.

Despite all the risk, this is not a fearful or angry collection of writings, although, I would assume that in trying these approaches many of the authors must have faced some criticism and scorn from other members of their institutions. The tone throughout is vigorous and thoughtful.

The subject areas represented here span a broad range of social inquiry—from schools to women struggling with AIDS to community development. For those in education, an interest of the readers of this journal, there are several important pieces here that deserve careful attention. Schultz and Banks (“Co-Optation, Ethical Dilemmas and Collective Memory”) is a riveting piece in which grade school instructor and former grade school student reflect upon the ways the teacher-student boundary can be molded and shaped in pursuit of educational goals. Likewise, Gershon, Peel and Bilinovich in “Collaboration Without Compromise: Reflecting on Collaborative Discensus in Action” takes a can opener to a shared class experience in a teacher education course to pry out the contents of the authors' multiple views

and issues of consensus and discensus. This is a piece that will hit home for many of us in higher education as we think back to those classes that had less than stellar outcomes! Smith and Helfenbein's "Translational Research in Education: Collaboration and Commitment in Urban Contexts" also provides new ways to consider challenging the traditional relationship between school-based K-12 educators and university-based K-12 researchers. A third piece that crosses and recrosses educational boundaries is Sawyer and Norris' "Duoethnography: Articulations /(Re)Creation of Meaning in the Making". This was my first introduction to the term duoethnography, and thanks to their work I am now eager to try this method that involves "two or more researchers work[ing] in tandem to dialogically critique and question the meanings they give to issues and constructs." (p. 129). In this instance Sawyer and Norris sought to explore the curriculum of sexual orientation as it is played out in schools and society.

Threaded throughout every chapter in this volume is a deep concern with the ethics of changing roles in qualitative research, as the collaborative turn requires. Each author describes the ethical workings of their situation in great depth, from the proposed solution through the many stages of its operation in the research project. I, for one, can feel overwhelmed by discussions of ethics—their volume, tone, or severity, but I found myself perking up and paying attention to the diversity of ethical concerns and the subtlety with which the authors attended to these concerns. This was not 'same old, same old' in regard to ethics, but, rather, the application of new and challenging lens.

Polyvocality is a necessity in this new world of collaboration in qualitative research. Every chapter in this book provides new experiences in multiple voicing. Indeed, it's a cacophony of new voicings for our methodological field. Polyvocality is alive and well in Willis and Siltanen's "Restorying Work Inside and Outside the Academy: Practices of Reflexive Team Research" in which the researchers recount a carefully staged process of 'restorying' the process of research, starting from a researcher's self-narrative and a researchee's telling, through multiple retellings that bring researcher self and researchee story closer and closer into an interactive zone of production.

Of special interest to me is the way that social science approaches to qualitative research and arts-based approaches to qualitative research are intertwined with each other in reflexive manner, with one commenting upon the other, rubbing away the artificial line between the two—social science and the arts. For instance, the opening piece "Troubling the Angels Redux: Tales of Collaboration Towards a Polyphonic Text" by Gerson, Lather, and Smithies, takes the hard topic of Women Living with HIV/AIDS and using what I consider to be artistically informed formatting techniques force the reader to examine an odyssey of collaboration through new lens. In Steeves, Pearce, Orr, Murphy, Huber, Huber, and

Clandinin's "What We Know First: Interrupting the Institutional Narrative of Individualism", a complex, page-long "word image" opens the chapter. In three columns, which can be read horizontally or vertically, the authors present us with a poem-based entry way to their discussion of collaboration.

While the arts figure throughout the volume, Part II takes specific aim at this target: How are the arts providing new ways of understanding qualitative research methodology? The readers of this journal will have particular interest in this section. Of these, the last three pieces cluster together in a neat grouping focusing on the performance or presentation of the arts and issues of collaboration in qualitative research. "Ethnodramatic Playwriting as Collaborative Work", by Conrad, McCaw, and Gusul, brings together an educational program implementer and university researcher with theater specialist or dramaturge and graduate student in theater arts to think about their collaboration developing a play related to the lived experience of implementing a drama education program in a juvenile detention center. The strongly differing roles and backgrounds weave back and forth through the process of playwriting and developing a theatrical production on this sensitive topic. In a different vein, George and Meggitt, both dancers, in "IMBED/IN BED: Two Perspectives on Dance and Collaboration" examine and compare their views on collaboration in dance, an art form that is inherently collaborative. George's contribution speaks to implicit collaboration in dance production, while Meggitt discusses explicit collaboration. Together they provide insight into the variety of ways dancers can collaborate, the impetus for collaboration and values implied in collaboration, considerations of ownership, and the possible outcomes of dance collaborations. All of this offers important food for thought to qualitative researchers seeking new lens through which to approach methodological questions of collaboration.

The third piece in this grouping of arts-focused pieces, Coulombe's "Improvisation and Collectivity: Practical Applications for research" was a particularly exciting find for me. A music educator at University of California's Riverside campus, Coulombe describes a many-year evolving project focused on improvisation in the arts. Collaboration was at the heart of the improvisatory performance works that were developed in class, university ensemble, and finally in a major festival. This article has much to say about the steady, flourishing development of good ideas when planted in rich soil. The many levels and aspects of collaboration it touches upon made me giddy. A special contribution of this article is the way it documents a unique research collaboration between university research offices, educators in higher education, community, and artists.

If I sound remarkably pleased with the book—I am. The kinds of questions I have for the authors are more of the—what next—variety, rather than —“why didn't you?” Or “You really should have!” If the ideas discussed in Gershon's book were implemented in

qualitative research methodology, how would we conduct the next generation of research? How would we train rising researchers? How will these insights inform new ways to present research? Is this going to challenge the hegemony of the five-chapter dissertation in APA style? The exciting thing about the implications of this book—is that they extend way into the future. There is the possibility of many ripples expanding from this one-pitched stone.

This book has value to a wide variety of audiences concerned with research methodology in the social sciences and humanities. It will also speak to those with interests in interdisciplinary integration and the arts. I would think that there would also be an audience outside of academia for a book like this—among arts administrators and community leaders who, by dint of their position, are forced to think about research and collaborating partners.

As an instructor, I would use it in whole or in part with masters or doctoral students in research methodology courses and/or courses where interdisciplinarity is of consideration. I can also see it being of value to practicum students in a broad range of areas from education and community psychology to arts therapy and community administration—all places where collaborative research will figure in their futures.

Finally, I have to say a word about the wonderful cover art provided by the editor's wife, artist Dena Gershon. I was so inspired by looking at it that I tried to reproduce the concept in felt and wire! I am still working on it, which is how I feel about the contents of this volume—I am still working on it....

About the Author

Judith Davidson is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education, University of Massachusetts Lowell. Her specialty area is qualitative research methodology with an emphasis on Qualitative Data Analysis Software and visual data analysis. She is co-author of *Qualitative Research Design for Software Users* (2008).

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