

# **Innovation in Social Research: Methodology, Experience and Practice**

**Tuesday 29 September 2009**

This one day event, for postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers, will focus on 'innovation' in social research methods. Leading academics will present ideas of 'innovation' in different methodological contexts and delegates will explore what it means to be 'innovative' in social research practice. This will involve moving beyond, whilst still drawing on, traditional ideas around social research methods. The aim will be to consider how 'classic' methodologies can be put to fresh use for current empirical practice. The event will offer a training opportunity for all who are interested in critical engagement in research methodology, and in research practice. Presentations, workshops and a plenary session will enable delegates to think critically about innovation in method, and in practice. Delegates will learn to consider innovative methodologies for their current and future social research practice.

Dr. Kahryn Hughes will introduce the day with a critical and reflective analysis of 'innovation' in social research methodologies. This will be followed by presentations on methodologies at the 'cutting edge' of current social research. Leading academics Professor Bren Neale (longitudinal methods) and Dr Jon Prosser (visual methods) will discuss how and why innovation in social research methods has supported their work. Further presentations will explore experience and practice in social research. Dr. Sharon Elley will explore emotional dimensions of conducting research as a PhD student. Professor Peter Dwyer will reflect on innovation in involving users in research.

Presentations will be complemented by practical group based workshops where delegates will explore specific issues and, where relevant, share insights from their own research and experience. The workshops will provide opportunity for delegates to critically evaluate broad themes around 'innovation':

- What is 'innovation' in social research methodologies?
- How could the pursuit of 'innovation' hinder or support social research practice?
- How might a 'visionary' approach apply to delegates' current or future empirical social research work?
- How can methodological 'innovation' provide meaning for substantive findings?
- What practical challenges does 'innovation' present for day to day research work?

Delegates will be asked to sign up to a workshop prior to the event. Please see the registration form for details.

<b>9.30</b>	<b>Registration</b>
<b>10.00</b>	<b>Introduction: Rachael Dobson and Katy Wright</b>
<b>10.15</b>	‘The origin of ideas? A two way traffic between ideas and research’ <b>Dr. Kahryn Hughes, University of Leeds</b>
<b>10.45</b>	‘(Re) thinking the 'long view': a 'new' paradigm for social research?’ <b>Professor Bren Neale, University of Leeds</b>
<b>11.25</b>	<b>Coffee</b>
<b>11.40</b>	‘Seeing Research as Innovation’ <b>Professor Jon Prosser, University of Leeds</b>
<b>12.20</b>	<b>Workshops</b>
<b>1.00</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>1.50</b>	‘Involving welfare service users in the research process’ <b>Professor Peter Dwyer, Nottingham Trent University</b>
<b>2.30</b>	‘Mapping the Emotional Maze in Qualitative Research’ <b>Dr. Sharon Elley, University of Leeds</b>
<b>3.10</b>	<b>Workshops</b>
<b>3.50</b>	<b>Participatory plenary: sharing the issues</b>
<b>4.30</b>	<b>Tea &amp; Close</b>

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Registration fee, £15. Fees include lunch, tea and coffee. Pay by cash or cheque prior to the day. To register attendance and workshop preference please complete a registration form.

For queries relating to the academic content of the conference email Rachael Dobson, [r.dobson00@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:r.dobson00@leeds.ac.uk)

For queries relating to event administration email Marie Johnson [M.B.Johnson@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:M.B.Johnson@leeds.ac.uk)

#### **Location Details**

Beechgrove House, University of Leeds, <http://lssi.leeds.ac.uk/visitors/>

#### **Travel Expenses**

Social Policy Association members can claim travel expenses of up to £40 per person, available on a first come and first served basis. Please see registration form for details. To become a member of the Social Policy Association go to <http://www.social-policy.com/membership.aspx>

**Dr Kahryn Hughes, University of Leeds**

'The origin of ideas? A two way traffic between ideas and research'

We do research to obtain new insights. However, particularly for early career researchers, when we come to do research we either feel it has all been done before, or we can only add a tiny part to a distinct and established field. It is easy for researchers to feel overwhelmed and dispirited, to think that their research has all been done before. Also, 'methods' are often seen as a necessary evil, a part of the research process that researchers have got to get past, the hurdle they have got to get over before they get down to the actual research. However, this points to a central paradox, because it is also possible to argue that the research itself is the locus in which ideas about methods are generated – the locus of innovation. This presentation will consider the dialogue between these two points. In particular, it will consider the relationship between rational components (general theoretical models and ideas) and empirical components (engagement with the research field) of social enquiry. This presentation will conclude with an approach which seeks to overcome this apparent division by considering how and with whom methodological innovation is shaped through a research process and why it might be useful and, in particular, a consideration of the relationships researchers have with and within their research field.

**Professor Bren Neale, University of Leeds**

'(Re) thinking the 'long view': a 'new' paradigm for social research?'

Real lives are not static: they are lived in and through time. While this observation is hardly new, it has heralded a renewed interest in innovative research designs that can capture life course dynamics and shed new light on processes of social change. The presentation will focus on qualitative temporal research and illustrate the rich explanatory power offered by this mode of enquiry.

**Professor Jon Prosser, University of Leeds**

'Seeing Research as Innovation'

I will focus on a personal approach to innovation in research methods. For me the primary challenge was to establish visual methods as an acceptable way of conducting research. Initially I aimed to use visual methods in my own work but this changed later to encompass the promotion of visual methods in order to counteract what I saw as the overdependence on word and number-based research. Hence, initially innovation for me was based on providing a rationale to the wider academic community of why visual methods were appropriate. Later, innovation meant influencing the direction and nature of visual methods by a range of different strategies which included international seminars, methodological exemplars, national training in visual methods, and attempts to resolve difficulties e.g. visual ethics. Beware – attending this session may change the way you conduct research - you may leave the event as 'seeing' researchers.

**Professor Peter Dwyer, Nottingham Trent University**

'Involving welfare service users in the research process'

The increasing involvement of 'welfare service users' in research opens up numerous fundamental questions about the process and purpose of social research. These include the ways in which we may seek to understand and explore the social world, the notion of 'expertise', the validity of standpoint knowledge and, importantly, issues of differential power, influence and control in the research process and how these may impact on participants' lives. Drawing on insights from three projects this presentation will highlight some of the

advantages and challenges that welfare service user involvement may bring and the extent to which the inclusion of users in research maybe considered innovative.

**Dr Sharon Elley, University of Leeds**

**'Mapping the Emotional Maze in Qualitative Research'**

The Qualiti (2007) 'Commissioned Inquiry into the Risk to Well Being of Researchers in Qualitative Research' highlighted 'emotional risk' as a key experience amongst researchers. There remains, however, a lack of research and debate which focuses on negative or problematic emotions that arise from the research process. Fear, loneliness, confusion, desperation, stress, 'compassion fatigue' and frustration are just some of the emotions that are glossed over or consigned to reflexive pieces, private memories and occasional peer dialogues. This silence on emotions is partly driven by an epistemological discomfort with recognising 'emotions' are part of the social science tradition. This session will address some of these issues and raise the profile of emotions in QR, suggesting there is a need for emotional management and emotion skills to be recognised and developed as part of innovative research practice. This includes:

- The research-respondent relationship including variables of age, class, gender, sexuality, sexual attraction, hostilities
- Power and emotions with gatekeepers, supervisors and participants
- Compromising the emotional self: disclosure and personal investment
- The private consequences and emotional costs of researching the lives of others
- Feelings of being an 'imposter' in an academic environment
- When research goes wrong: emotional fallout for researcher and participant
- Turning negative emotions into positive resources

Rachael Dobson  
December 2008