

Dialogic Social Inquiry: Qualitative Research Without a Methodological Map

Jan DeFehr, MSW, PhD; Christian Israel Lizama, MA Valladares and Cynthia Sosa Infante, MA

Graduate students often assume they must apply a research methodology for their theses or dissertations. This workshop explores collaborative dialogic alternatives to methodologically driven research.

Qualitative research courses teach novice researchers that legitimate knowledge production requires applied methodology. Graduate students are likely to learn that their research methodology is to be found in textbooks and journals, far from the relationships at the center of their proposed research projects. The challenge, as it is commonly construed, is to locate a suitable method and then apply it faithfully.

When produced outside its sites of application, methodology may be incoherent with participant realities and rationalities—it may displace local traditions of inquiry. As a non-living device, methodology cannot sense the emergence of unanticipated changes, constraints, and possibilities. Led by agendas produced elsewhere, researchers may be unanswerable to prompts and invitations found only within the research context itself.

This workshop draws on social construction theory, collaborative-dialogic practices, and specific thesis and dissertation examples, to show how dialogic inquiry produces its own unique process each time it occurs. Dialogic social inquiry comes from, and remains connected with, the participant community at the core of the inquiry effort.

When a research process derives from its own living social ecology, it can more sensitively and boldly do justice to the dynamic requirements and transformative possibilities embedded in the work.