

## Synergy workshop report

### SYNERGY 2010: “Beyond Talk and Text”: Stretching and Enriching Qualitative Research Practice

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The town of Cluj-Napoca, Romania provided the perfect backdrop for SYNERGY 2010, which was my first major workshop; made even more exciting because my MSc research paper was accepted for oral presentation at the subsequent EHP conference. SYNERGY had a varied programme and was extremely well organised thanks the outstanding work of the organising committee (Panayiota Andreou, Maria Karekla, Karen Morgan, Felix Naughton, Gjalt-Yorn Peters, Ann-Marie Plass, and Benjamin Schüz), and the local organisation of Eva Kallay.



Hard work at the workshop...

The eminent Professor Kerry Chamberlain, an expert in the field of qualitative research facilitated this SYNERGY workshop, which aimed to encourage participants to push the boundaries and explore innovative developments in qualitative methods; to develop critical thinking about qualitative research in general; and promote understanding of the value and the implications of a creative and reflexive approach to research practice.

The fifteen participants had diverse research interests and represented seven countries, with experience ranging from more naïve researchers about to embark on doctorate research (such as myself) to more established researchers. SYNERGY had all the ingredients to make a perfect workshop, comprising a handful of informal talks, a drop of discussion, a dash of group work, a sprinkling of delegate research presentations and a pinch of feedback, all stirred together with a generous splash of reflexivity.

Professor Chamberlain's talks were thought provoking and inspiring, and challenged us to think of qualitative research as fluid and flexible. We considered alternative approaches to qualitative design, data collection and analysis, and reporting of research findings. We learned that research is interpretive by nature, and

should have a sound epistemological, theoretical and methodological basis but should be data driven. As researchers we should also be engaging in ‘doing’ theory rather than ‘having’ theory; theorising throughout the analytical process. We should be more adventurous in our data collection using multiple approaches where appropriate (e.g. art, theatre, elicitation, biography); move away from the restrictive “methodology” mind set towards a more critical approach; be more reflexive throughout the research process; focus on the issues, topic and research question (rather than the methodology); and finally be more interpretative in our analysis.

The individual group-work afforded me the opportunity to stretch my skills and develop my PhD research, which was facilitated by other delegates through a process of knowledge sharing and constructive feedback. Each delegate presented their worked-up project to the whole group on the final day. The ideas and skills I developed within the workshop have without a doubt enhanced my PhD research project, and will enable me to ‘do’ more theorising, and to adopt a more reflexive approach. Ultimately, I was fortified with a greater insight into the essence and creative scope of qualitative research.

As SYNERGY drew to a close, a ‘friendly’ game of dodge ball with the parallel CREATE workshop delegates resulted in SYNERGY’s first victory over CREATE for some years. A triumphant roar is in order for not only for the positive social outcomes of the SYNERGY experience, but also for the achievement of the original aims of the workshop. Aims to provide a

...and fun at the dodgeball game



support network for both early-career and established researchers, to facilitate collaborative working within Health Psychology throughout Europe and beyond, and to disseminate innovative ideas that will propel qualitative research within Health Psychology into exciting uncharted waters. ■

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