

Title:

***Using a qualitative lens to explore the relationships among information, people and technology:  
Informing iSchool research and learning and teaching.***

Organisers:

Alison Jane Pickard, Faculty of Engineering and Environment, Northumbria University  
[alison.pickard@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:alison.pickard@northumbria.ac.uk)

Kendra Albright, Kent State University. [kalbrig7@kent.edu](mailto:kalbrig7@kent.edu)

Theresa Anderson University of Technology, Sydney. [Theresa.Anderson@uts.edu.au](mailto:Theresa.Anderson@uts.edu.au)

Ina Fourie, University of Pretoria. [ina.fourie@up.ac.za](mailto:ina.fourie@up.ac.za)

Heidi Julien, State University of New York, Buffalo. [heidijul@buffalo.edu](mailto:heidijul@buffalo.edu)

Annemaree Lloyd, Swedish School of Library and Information Science. [annemaree.lloyd@hb.se](mailto:annemaree.lloyd@hb.se)

## **Abstract**

Qualitative research is uniquely suited to exploring the relationships between people, information and technology, an eclectic mix of approach, design, data collection, analysis and presentation that allows us to explore the diverse patterns and complex meanings of our relationships with information and technology. While there is a recognition of the value inherent in rigorous and good quality qualitative research, the know-how pertaining to the why and how, along with explicit real world examples, has not been as widely disseminated as it could be. This workshop aims to go beyond the textbook descriptions of qualitative research to provide a forum for the sharing of qualitative investigation ‘in the wild’, in all its diversity, complexity and reflexivity. The workshop will explore the practice and teaching of qualitative research across the iSchool community in order to extend our network and share our approaches to both.

## **Keywords:**

Qualitative research, Curriculum development, Learning resources, Professional education,

## **Description**

### ***Purpose and intended audience***

The purpose of the workshop is:

1. to work towards a shared understanding of research using qualitative inquiry.
2. to provide an opportunity to critically discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches to qualitative inquiry.
3. to provide an opportunity to experience the use of qualitative research methods for participants with a ‘book knowledge’ of these methods but who may not have practical experience.
4. to build a community of interest around the development of the qualitative lens in education for research methods in information.

The intended audience includes all those with an interest in teaching and supporting learning in research methods for information, including experienced instructors, early career faculty, pedagogical researchers/scholars of teaching and learning, educational/academic developers and doctoral students/teaching assistants.

### ***Proposed format***

Outline based on half day session.

1. **Introduction and orientation** (20 mins)

Introduce workshop organisers and participants; Present goals and expected outcomes; Outline project background and planned activities; Present working definitions of key terms and concepts whilst acknowledging the wealth of experience there is in the room from all participants. The organisers will present brief scenarios of their own practical experience (research and teaching qualitative research)

2. **Breakout session 1 (groups of 2-4): *What are the characteristics of a good qualitative researcher and good qualitative research?*** (10 mins intro, 40 mins breakout, 20 mins plenary)

Introduce brief scenarios and distribute sample qualitative tools (prepared by workshop organisers). Invite participants to review the scenario they have been allocated and evaluate the usability of the sample tools/techniques capture findings on flipcharts for plenary presentation.

Using a sketched 'person', encourage the group to come up with an agreed pictorial description of a qualitative researcher and the significance this representation has for exploring

Encourage participants to think beyond the textbook examples of qualitative inquiry and identify what problems could be encountered and suggest potential solutions.

**Comfort Break** (15 minutes)

3. **Breakout session 2: *Thinking qualitatively – preparing qualitative researchers to step out into the wild*** (5 mins intro, 25 mins breakout, 10 mins plenary)

In small groups we will explore how iSchools prepare their students to explore the relationships between people, information and technology through a qualitative lens and how we deal with the subject diversity within our discipline.

4. **Workshop plenary** (15 mins)

Review key messages from presentations and discussions; Explore interest in continuing the conversation beyond the conference; Agree next steps, e.g., writing up the event (organisers and participants).

***Goals or outcomes***

- To facilitate the discourse around qualitative inquiry in order to establish a sound theoretical base and work towards a shared understanding of concepts and characteristics.
- Outline pedagogical strategies for incorporating qualitative inquiry instruction in professional education.
- Facilitate networking with a view to future collaborative initiatives and projects to support teaching qualitative inquiry for information and to encourage the theoretical and philosophical debate.

***Relevance to the iConference***

The iSchool movement shares “*a fundamental interest in the relationships between information, people, and technology*” it is imperative that we continue to debate and develop our approaches to investigating these relationships and seeking solutions and understanding. Three decades ago Kirk (1997) argued that professionals in our field needed “*to know why and how people think and act as they do if they are to respond effectively to the information needs of those who use library and information services*” (p. 261). Since then there has been a significant growth in the application of qualitative inquiry to address these ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, but the application of this methodology has not been accompanied by a proportionate amount of methodological theory construction. Although the use of qualitative approaches

to information science research have become more prominent, there is still a lack of debate and discussion at the theoretical level to support choices. While there is a recognition of the value inherent in rigorous and good quality qualitative research, the knowledge pertaining to the why and how, along with explicit real world examples, has not been as widely disseminated as it could be. For Day (2011) “*The answer is conceptual critique, and this critique must extend to not only the theoretical models, but to research practices and methods and to the very conception of theory and the conception of disciplinary functionality in LIS. There is still work to be done here.*” (p.86). This workshop aims to go beyond the textbook descriptions of qualitative research to provide a forum for the sharing of qualitative investigation ‘in the wild’, in all its diversity, complexity and reflexivity. The workshop will explore the practice and teaching of qualitative research across the iSchool community in order to extend our network and share our approaches to both. The workshop organisers bring with them, not only the experience of qualitative inquiry in a variety of innovative approaches, but also a desire to share and debate those approaches. The workshop scenarios will be based on examples of innovative work carried out by the organisers, such as:

- Albright’s work with incarcerated youths (Albright & Gavigan, 2014);
- the collaborative autoethnography of Anderson and Fourie (2015);
- ‘photovoice’ as a way of studying people’s information practices (Julien, Given & Opryshko, 2013);
- Lloyd’s work using constructivist grounded theory in diverse contexts to understand information relationships
- Pickard’s exploration of the use of constructivist user studies to systems designers (Pickard & Dixon, 2004) and the application of participatory action research with young people (Pickard & Walton, 2016).

As well as practical experience of qualitative inquiry ‘in the wild’, the organisers are keen to share their experience of teaching these approaches to neophyte researchers and experiencing the often ‘white knuckle ride’ of qualitative investigation as it rolls and cascades to its final destination.

### **Duration**

The workshop will be a half-day event.

### **Attendance**

Our workshop format uses a mix of scenario review, plenary and breakout discussions. We expect to attract 25-30 people, but we could work with as few as ten or as many as 50 participants.

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