

## **Moving from collision to integration: Reflecting on the experience of mixed methods**

Gary Rolfe

*Journal of Research in Nursing* 2007 12: 85

DOI: 10.1177/1744987106069516

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jrn.sagepub.com/content/12/1/85.citation>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Journal of Research in Nursing* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://jrn.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://jrn.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Jan 9, 2007

[What is This?](#)

# Moving from collision to integration

## Reflecting on the experience of mixed methods

**Gary Rolfe**

*Professor of Nursing*

University of Wales, Swansea



Journal of Research  
in Nursing

© 2007

SAGE PUBLICATIONS

London, Thousand Oaks,

New Delhi

VOL 12(1) 85–86

DOI: 10.1177/

1744987106069516

This paper is part of a growing body of literature that attempts to explore the process of conducting research from an insider perspective. As such, it is innovative, adventurous, informative and, perhaps inevitably given its subject matter, contradictory. Some of these contradictions and dissonances are freely acknowledged by the author, who was, at the same time, conducting a clinical trial and a constructionist examination of certain aspects of that trial. As such she was faced with the dilemma of having to defend and positively present the conduct and findings of the trial during a period of gradual realisation of the limitations of both the method and the overarching methodology of positivist research for ‘socially complex interventions’.

Part of the aim of this paper would appear to be to recognise and reconcile these tensions; to demonstrate how, within certain constraints, positivist and constructionist paradigms can be integrated within the same project to become ‘more than simply a collection of parallel studies’. Whilst I would like to share the author’s optimism, there remain a number of challenging and perhaps insurmountable problems to be addressed. Thus, whilst I welcome this paper as a significant move away from the ‘unreconstructed quantitative researchers’ approach of using qualitative studies merely to support quantitative ones, my fear is that it simply reverses the power dynamic. The problem is that this particular mixed-methods research is asymmetrical. By this, I mean that the qualitative arm is, to a large extent, research into the conduct of the quantitative arm, rather than offering two perspectives on the same phenomenon. Thus, the resulting critique of positivism is rooted firmly in a paradigm that positivists would contest as lacking in validity and reliability. Positivists are no more likely to be persuaded by the findings of this qualitative inquiry into the conduct of clinical trials than, say, constructionists would be of a controlled trial to examine the worth of ethnographic research.

In my view, the asymmetrical nature of the study casts some doubt on its claim of ‘moving from collision to integration’. The author freely admits her scepticism of the trial method and acknowledges that ‘people aligned with the positivist paradigm view constructionism in a similar way’. Whilst it might be possible for researchers to work across these gulfs in a multi-disciplinary way, I remain unconvinced that true inter-disciplinary research of the kind advocated by the author really is possible. Thus, whilst the recommendations for inter-paradigmatic research appear, on the surface, to be both feasible and reasonable, a closer examination reveals a clear constructionist

slant. So, for example, the would-be inter-disciplinary research team is encouraged to adopt a stance that 'overtly aims to uncover the taken-for-granted inherent in the positivist assumptions' without acknowledging similar taken-for-granted assumptions in constructionism. Similarly, the 'illusion of certainty' of positivism is contrasted with the uncertainty of the 'emergent approach' of constructionism (not, you will note, the certainty of positivism versus the 'illusion of uncertainty' of constructivism). The recommendation, then, is for all researchers to renounce the illusion and embrace the contingency of the constructionist paradigm rather than the certainty of positivism.

Having expressed these doubts, however, I believe this paper offers an important step towards a reconciliation between two competing paradigms and, most importantly, does so on terms favourable to qualitative researchers based on constructionist presuppositions. For this, it is to be warmly commended. Nevertheless, it inevitably falls short of its ultimate aim of what, in my opinion, is neither possible nor desirable: an integration of the two paradigms.

**Gary Rolfe** qualified as a psychiatric nurse in 1983 and practised for several years in acute admission units before moving into education. For the past ten years he has been teaching practice development, reflective practice, action research and clinical supervision to nurses and healthcare practitioners. Gary spent his entire career in Portsmouth before moving to the University of Wales, Swansea in 2003, where he has a particular interest in establishing a network of practice development units. E-mail: G.Rolfe@swansea.ac.uk