

*Editors' Afterword***Special Issue: Mixed Methods**

Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, United States

Cheryl Poth, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Canada

© 2015 Onwuegbuzie & Poth. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons-Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License 4.0 International (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, not used for commercial purposes, and if transformed, the resulting work is redistributed under the same or similar license to this one.

**Continuing the Conversation:
Unique Mixed Methods Contributions to Qualitative Research**

Much has happened within the field of mixed methods research since we embarked on the journey of generating this initial special issue; among the key developments was the establishment of the Mixed Methods International Research Association (MMIRA). The launch of MMIRA was significant because it represented a culmination of efforts of several years of informal discussions and gatherings of cross-disciplinary mixed methods researchers from around the world. Among the main objectives of MMIRA is to provide a forum for mixed methods researchers to share their international and interdisciplinary problems, perspectives, findings, and solutions (see www.mmira.wildapricot.org). With similar aspirational goals, this first special issue brought together the cross-disciplinary work of authors from Australia, Canada, Germany, South Africa, and the United States to enhance further our understandings of using mixed methods research for informing and enhancing qualitative research.

In this closing editorial, we highlight two interwoven themes across the manuscripts of this first special issue related to designs and research teams within a general call for increased access to examples of mixed methods research studies within methodological-specific and discipline-specific publications. We began with the overall challenge of access as highlighted by the content analysis of six leading qualitative journals by Archibald and colleagues. Among the key findings we found astonishing was the *very low* prevalence rate of mixed methods research articles (less than 2%) and, in our view, the *low* rate of inclusion of a rationale within this subset of articles for using and integrating qualitative and quantitative methods (52%). Although guiding practices for publishing mixed methods research are readily available (e.g., Leech, Onwuegbuzie, & Combs, 2011; Mertens, 2011; Onwuegbuzie & Corrigan, 2014), it reminds us of the need for disseminating to broad audiences. To that end, we call for continued advocacy on the part of

mixed methods researchers to journal editorial boards for publication of mixed methods research. We are hopeful that a future content analysis of the next decade (e.g., 2015-2025) will reflect increased accessibility to examples of high-quality mixed methods research within qualitatively focused journals.

Several authors offer examples of pioneering designs through describing integration of innovative procedures within mixed methods research. Whereas some authors in this issue advance new combinations of methods; for example, arts-informed, qualitative, and quantitative procedures (Shannon-Baker), Qualitative Description with phenomenological overtones (Turpin), spatial and qualitative data (Rucks & Bierbaum); others modify existing mixed methods research designs: for example, expanding the two-phase explanatory sequential design to include three-phases (Tsushima). The usefulness of existing mixed methods design typologies are well established as tools for guiding research design and pedagogy (e.g., Guest, 2013, Nastasi, Hitchcock, & Brown, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Even though typologies might offer advantages related to a common language and structure for procedures, discussions about the shortcomings of the methods of classification are emergent (Guest, 2013). Among the key concerns are unintended impacts on obscuring temporal order of data collection and/or analysis, details about integration, and limiting data combinations considered possible. When existing typologies did not work for our authors, they simply described their own mixed methods research designs. To that end, we promote the use of innovative mixed methods research designs to open up new areas of inquiry. We are hopeful that the methodological ideas presented in this special issue are built upon in future research endeavours.

Several authors described their use of transdisciplinary research teams as being beneficial to the research outcomes; yet, the extent to which descriptions were provided related to individual members' background, and contributions differed across the manuscripts. Turpin and colleagues (this issue) bounded their team description to disciplinary and methodological expertise, whereas Archibald and colleagues (this issue), in addition to categorizing members as students and faculty and program areas included a description of their collaborative process:

Generally speaking, as a team, we value each methodology equally and do not adhere to a single ontology or epistemology, although one of us had significantly more experience and training in quantitative methods. Before conducting the study, we discussed our research experiences, values, and biases as part of the MMIG. We also discussed community of practice issues regarding MMR at length. (p. 8)

Key roles of individual research team members in applying a framework was noted by Classen and colleagues (this issue). The research team was described as having qualitative and quantitative research expertise as well as representing various disciplines including nutrition, agricultural economics, environmental science, law, consumer sciences, social sciences in agriculture, and social anthropology. The contribution of valuable local contextual knowledge by two research team members living and working in the communities of the study context also was recognized. Finally, the research participants were described as having played an integral part of the analytical and interpretation processes. These combined efforts were credited with allowing “for more in-depth contextual reflection and interpretation, important to understanding the complex dimensions of sustainable diets that are mostly missing in standard study designs”, (p. 76). We have recognized the increasingly common use of mixed methods research teams since the beginning of the 21st century; especially noted in the health sciences (O’Cathain, 2009; Plano Clark, 2010) and elsewhere (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2015). Indeed, when Onwuegbuzie et al. (2015)—who conceptualized what they called a *mixed methods bibliometric study*—recently analyzed all articles ($n = 146$) published in the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research (JMMR)* from 2007 (its inception) to 2014 and all articles ($n = 223$) published in the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods (IJQM)* during the same time period, they documented that *JMMR* authors

had a statistically significantly higher degree of collaboration (i.e., percentage of articles with multiple authors) and a statistically significantly higher number of authors per article than did *IJQM* authors, with *JMMR* authors being 1.19 times (95% confidence interval = 1.02, 1.38) more likely to collaborate than were *IJQM* authors. Specifically, the work undertaken by Curry et al. (2013) to unpack the nature of group dynamics and tensions within mixed methods research teams has been very important, yielding important guiding principles for teams. Further, to understand better the contributions of a mixed methods research expert as part of a team, Poth (2012) describes the various roles of a mixed methods practitioner. As another example, Collins, Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, and Frels (2013) outlined a technique for conducting debriefing interviews throughout the mixed methods research process to document the degree that mixed methods research teams are implementing quality criteria in an optimally synergistic manner. We hope that these discussions continue recent efforts to enhance the capacity of mixed methods research teams to work collaboratively.

We conclude with a final thanks to everyone involved in producing this special issue in the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. Please stay tuned for the second special issue continuing the conversation related to topics pertinent to mixed methods research that illustrate its use for informing and enhancing qualitative research.

References

- Collins, K. M. T., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Johnson, R. B., & Frels, R. K. (2013). Practice note: Using debriefing interviews to promote authenticity and transparency in mixed research. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 7, 271-283. doi:10.5172/mra.2013.7.2.271
- Curry, L. A., O'Cathain, A., Plano Clark, V. L., Aroni, R., Feters, M., & Berg, D. (2012). The role of group dynamics in mixed methods health sciences research teams. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6, 5-20. doi: 10.1177/1558689811416941
- Guest, G. (2013). Describing mixed methods research: An alternative to typologies. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 7, 141-150. doi:10.1177/1558689812461179
- Leech, N. L., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Combs, J. P. (2011). Writing publishable mixed research articles: Guidelines for emerging scholars in the health sciences and beyond. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 5, 7-24. doi:10.5172/mra.2011.5.1.7
- Mertens, D.M. (2011). Publishing mixed methods research, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 5, 3-5. doi:10.1177/1558689810390217
- Nastasi, B. K., Hitchcock, J. H., & Brown, L. M. (2010). An inclusive framework for conceptualizing mixed methods design typologies: Moving toward fully integrated synergistic research models. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Sage Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (2nd ed., pp. 305-338). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- O'Cathain, A. (2009). Mixed methods research in the health sciences: A quiet revolution [Editorial]. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 3, 3-6. doi:10.1177/1558689808326272
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Corrigan, J. A. (2014). Improving the quality of mixed research reports in the field of human resource development and beyond: A call for rigor as an ethical practice. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 25, 273-299. doi:10.1002/hrdq.21197
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Wilcox, R. Gonzales, V., Hoisington, S., Lambert, J., Jordan, J.,... Valle, R. (2015, March). *Collaboration patterns among mixed researchers: A multidisciplinary examination*. Paper presented at the Mixed Methods Research Caribbean Conference, Kingston, Jamaica.
- Plano Clark, V. L. (2010). The adoption and practice of mixed methods: U.S. trends in federally funded health-related research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16, 428-440. doi:10.1177/1077800410364609
- Poth, C. (2012). Exploring the role of mixed methods practitioner within educational research teams: A cross case comparison of the research planning process. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 6, 315-332. doi:10.5172/mra.2012.6.3.314
- Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.