Reflecting on the Losses and Gains of an Unorthodox Year

Linda Liebenberg

As we come to the end of what has been an exceptional year, it makes sense to take time to pause and reflect. This year has certainly not been without its challenges and its immense losses. It has however also been a year of innovations, heightened creativity, and development. And so, as we move into 2021, reflecting on what has been and anticipating what is to come, we can both mourn and celebrate. Surely one of our greatest losses this year as qualitative researchers has been the passing of Cathy Charmaz. Her work and gentle mentoring was a nurturing and formative resource for so many of us. The legacy of her innovative and creative work will continue to guide researchers for many years to come. This is clearly reflected in the many submissions we have received and published this year focused on the use of grounded theory (cf. Canlas & Karpudewan, 2020; Coşkun, 2020; Kassam et al., 2020; Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020). Despite her enduring legacy, her continuing insights, kindness, and generosity of spirit will be sorely missed.

I imagine many of us are also missing our research communities; those warm and insightful meetings with colleagues and research participants that provide impetus for our work. This loss has, however, challenged our creativity and pushed us to find innovative ways of using technology to continue our connections and collaborations. It has also highlighted the central importance of qualitative research during times such as these, as noted by Michelle Teti (Teti et al., 2020) and exemplified by Jackie Sanders (2020) in their editorials earlier this year. Certainly, Sage has been instrumental in responding to the needs stemming from COVID-19, many of which will help guide our work in the year to come. This is clearly reflected in the many submissions we have received and published this year focused on the use of grounded theory (cf. Canlas & Karpudewan, 2020; Coşkun, 2020; Kassam et al., 2020; Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020). Despite her enduring legacy, her continuing insights, kindness, and generosity of spirit will be sorely missed.

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Perhaps somewhat ironically, this year also saw the publication of our special issue on qualitative research failures. I am very grateful to have Alex Clark and Bailey Sousa (2020) serve as guest editors for this issue. While the concept for the issue was developed well before any of us were aware of COVID-19, once again, their innovation and creativity has been timely! In the editorial they share with researchers their manifesto for Better Research Failures. Concomitantly, the wonderful manuscripts included in this issue reassure us that at times the research journey can be something of a nightmare (Ciuhan & Iliescu, 2020; CohenMiller et al., 2020; Eckert, 2020; Gregory, 2020; Held, 2020; Wohlfart, 2020). Here, Clark and Sousa’s manifesto encourage us to embrace these failures with enthusiasm and to share them confidently, allowing these failures to facilitate new learnings and creativity. Surely if there was ever a time when we needed to embrace this mindset, it was now!

We are reminded that our challenges are not limited to those of the COVID-19 pandemic in our second special issue of 2020, focused on the constructions of children’s voices in qualitative research. This issue, guest edited by Gail Teachman and Brenda Gladstone (2020), brings together a wonderful collection of articles that extend our thinking of how we understand, access and integrate the perspectives of children in our work (Facca et al., 2020; Ingulfsvann et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Pincock & Jones, 2020; Ritterbusch et al., 2020). This inspiring issue is linked to a larger knowledge sharing project that has included three virtual symposiums and follow-up discussion groups. Videos from these events are linked to some of the manuscripts (Caldairou-Bessette et al., 2020; Carnevale, 2020; Liebenberg et al., 2020).

The challenges of this year have not only been felt in our field work, but also in the dissemination of our findings. Across the board we have seen a sharp decline in availability of reviewers and a definite increase in review time of manuscripts. It is helpful to remember that we, as academic researchers and writers, are the reviewers. We have all experienced an unprecedented increase in our workloads, whether as writers or reviewers, our anticipated schedules seem to constantly be subverted by delays. Despite these delays, high quality work continues to be submitted and rich, encouraging reviews continue

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to be provided. To this end, our team at IJQM would like to extend our deep and enduring gratitude to our ever-patient authors and generous pool of reviewers. As a sign of our appreciation, we are including at the end of this editorial, the names of all those who have contributed to the ever-growing quality of IJQM by means of their reviews.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to end this editorial on a celebratory note: our ever-growing impact factor and recognition as a Q1 journal are certainly reasons to be encouraged. This continuing success would not be possible without our wonderful reviewers, talented authors, and enthusiastic readers. That said, this success definitely rests on a highly committed IJQM team. This team includes our associate editors, our editorial board, and the team at Sage. Life and its own struggles continue despite the added burden that this pandemic has placed on each of us and our families. This is especially true for our colleagues in India, working in publishing production. Despite these challenges, and as always, this phenomenal team has pushed through, ensuring that IJQM continues to thrive. And for this I would like to express my heartfelt thanks, and wish everyone a wonderful 2021!

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