

A synergistic visiting scholar grant

The background

On February 2011 I was very pleased to visit Professor Kerry Chamberlain at Massey University in New Zealand, funded by an EHPS visiting scholar grant. The aim of the visit was to work further on a qualitative research project which was initially developed during the EHPS Synergy workshop in Cluj-Napoca in August 2010, facilitated by Prof. Kerry Chamberlain.

This project was part of my PhD research and built on previous work I have done at Coventry University, under the supervision of Professor David French, who fully supported the idea to ask Prof. Chamberlain for his expert advice.

My PhD research focuses on building an evidence base for effective walking groups. The project supported by this funding used an innovative methodology to approach the research aims, to improve our understanding and provide original insights into the area. It used the novel go-along walking methodology. The go-along walking methodology refers to a conversation style interview, where interviewer and interviewee walk along and discuss characteristics of the place that might have an influence on the interviewee's behaviour and experience of meaning making. During walk-along interviews, the context where behaviour occurs becomes a stimulus for discussion, information that would not be available in such details, in an abstract face-to-face setting. Walk-along interviews provide a deeper, elaborated and more relevant data to the focus of the research than face-to-face interviews.

Prof. Kerry Chamberlain has made an outstanding contribution to qualitative research within health psychology. His work leads the field of qualitative health psychology worldwide. His practice in the development and refinement of qualitative methodologies has enhanced significantly our understanding on health behaviours.

The idea of working with Prof. Chamberlain on the go-along walking methodology started as a unique opportunity for me to advance my qualitative research skills. The funding provided by the EHPS allowed this to be developed, as well evolving into a "visit" to a different way of approaching qualitative research questions.

Visiting Kerry Chamberlain

During my visit I had the chance to work further with Prof. Chamberlain on the walk-along methodology and analysis, and produce the first draft of the study. We discussed what and how this innovative methodology adds to the general research question of my thesis and how the results could be applied into practice. The process of analysis of the walk-along interviews was also developed after discussions with Prof. Chamberlain during the visit. A skype meeting with Prof. French, who supervises my thesis, contributed significantly to the project's progress, within the overall aims of the PhD research. The analysis is now in progress and we expect that the findings will provide us with a new insight into the health behaviour in context.

From the first meeting with Prof. Chamberlain I came across with his admirable talent to challenge your thinking in a way that boost your ability to see, talk and argue about issues that arise through different phases of research, from the research questions and theoretical background to the applicability and usefulness of the research findings. He generously and creatively questioned and advised on the project, setting an example of how innovative ideas can be applied into research practice.

I was also pleased to participate in the Albany Discourse and Narrative Group (ADaNG) meeting, where Prof. Chamberlain and his colleagues discuss ideas, get informed and comment on research matters, advise on each others' research and produce collaborative projects. Members of ADaNG team, who have used the walk-along methodology, shared their experience with me, discussed challenges and ethical dilemmas that might arise during walk-along interviews and effective ways to deal with them, proposed relevant literature and stimulated alternative ways of approaching qualitative research. Further discussions with Prof. Chamberlain's colleagues about qualitative research followed the meeting in less formal way.

Visiting Prof. Chamberlain could not be limited to project-related work only. I participated in a group meeting about qualitative analysis and methodologies, where Prof. Chamberlain with his unlimited enthusiasm and professionalism engage us in a dialogue and encouraged us to step back from specific research questions and critically approach our role as researchers when interacting with participants and analyzing data. A considerable part was given to the process of analysis and how different challenges can be faced while analyzing qualitative data. Prof. Chamberlain's comments made complex issues seem simple and

manageable, by giving efficient examples and tips. A fruitful exchange of ideas about different methodologies and whether and how these could serve the research questions was done, with Prof. Chamberlain motivating and leading for more elaborative and critical way of thinking.

Apart from several formal one-to-one and group meetings with the aim to progress my understanding on the walk-along methodology and to advance my education on qualitative research, I was very happy to accept Prof. Chamberlain and his wife Vivian's generous hospitality, which provided me with the opportunity to spend much more time with him. Less formal "drive-along", "eat- along" and "walk-along" conversations, gave me the opportunity to discuss with Prof. Chamberlain any practical and theoretical challenges I faced when doing qualitative research. Prof. Chamberlain was always welcoming to take advantage of any available time we had, so that this visit could be of high benefit for the project and my education. During formal and less formal discussions Prof. Chamberlain not only taught me some important skills when doing qualitative research but also was an inspiring mentor who led by example.

A special place in this report should be given to Vivian and other visiting students, for the time we shared walking, chatting, swimming and having much more memorable experiences in beautiful New Zealand.

Finally, taking this opportunity I would like to express my gratitude to EHPS for this grant and to Prof. Kerry Chamberlain and Prof. David French for supporting this synergistic project and visit.

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*Prof. Chamberlain, visiting gangs
and Vivian enjoying Kerry's
impeccable cooking skills*