Asking the Big Questions that Guide Small Decisions:

Developing Academic Library Infrastructure in Support of Graduate Students' Qualitative Research

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Four types of questions for engaging with qualitative researchers*.

*No, you don’t need to use NVivo

Experience

Social Sciences Research Librarian, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Hired with the expectation to teach NVivo and Atlas.ti in our workshop series.

Extended the series to include:

- added workshops on MAXQDA
- free software (Taguette, QualCoder)
- planning qualitative data analysis

Consultations show that software is often a secondary concern for researchers who are still figuring out how they will conduct their qualitative analysis.

Co-teaching a graduate level course on CAQDAS in Social Sciences & Education Research

Research

Going qual in: Towards methodologically inclusive data work in academic libraries (forthcoming in IASSIST Quarterly), with Hilary Bussell (Ohio State)

Semi-structured interviews with 11 academic librarians on definitions of data literacy and the types of data work at their libraries

Experiences of learning and conducting qualitative research

Semi-structured interviews with 19 University of Illinois faculty, staff, and graduate researchers on their experience learning to conduct qualitative research.
Still in the analysis phase, but some participant experiences are shared here.

Defining qualitative research

There is no single definition that will encompass all qualitative work.

Qualitative could refer to the method of data collection, the format of the data, and the approach to analysis (Small, 2021).

Big Q vs small q qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kidder & Fine, 1987)

> Big Q: "fully qualitative," recognizes role of researcher's position in developing knowledge, building understanding that is "about nuance, complexity, and even contradiction." (Braun & Clare, 2021, p. 7)
> small q: uses qualitative data or methods, but more in line with the "values of quantitative positivist research" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 7)

Qualitative methods

Methods refers to the specific actions taken by the researcher to collect and analyzing qualitative data.

> Examples of analysis methods include: transcribing interview audio, coding, writing memos, counting words, examining co-occurring codes, etc.

Methods are shaped by the choice of methodology, theory, epistemology, and ontology (Staller, 2013).

But there is usually not a clear set of step-by-step instructions that tell the researcher what to do, and most published works do not go into detail (Paulus et al, 2017).

Learning qualitative data analysis (QDA)

Curtiss (2021)



Where do students learn QDA?

Depending on their program, graduate students may not have coursework that specifically addresses qualitative methodologies or analysis.

Students in fields that emphasize quantitative work may not have any coursework in qualitative methodologies or qualitative experts on their committees.

Those that do have relevant coursework may not have the opportunity to practice data analysis.

How do students learn technology for QDA?

The use of software for QDA is often taught *outside* the classroom, not integrated with the learning of qualitative methods.

> Workshops that focus solely on the operation of the software provide little guidance on developing an *analytic practice* that moves the research towards answering their research questions (Schmieder, 2020)

Access is a major problem; even student licenses for programs like NVivo, Atlas.ti, and MAXQDA are in the $100 range. Full price licenses are $600+.

> There is no single tool that is used across disciplines or campuses (Silver & Bulloch, 2017), making it more difficult to offer instruction or consultation.

Library-based support for QDA

Access to software and/or workshops on their use (e.g. Røddense, et al., 2019; Swygart-Hobaugh, 2019).

Do library workers have the resources they need to adequately support the use of CAQDAS?

Can patrons find relevant information on library websites (Cain et al., 2019)

As part of library data literacy instruction and data services

QDL study participants perceived less support for the use of qualitative data in their libraries, in line with Swygart-Hobaugh's (2016) description of qualitative data as the "Jan Brady" of library data services.

And it’s (usually) not our job to be experts in methodology or analysis software!

We are, however, very good at asking questions to help patrons articulate what they need to know.



Four types of questions for engaging with qualitative researchers in consultations, workshops, or online resources.

Goals

What research questions do you have? What does it look like to answer this question? What format will answers be? (e.g. narratives, themes with counts, word counts, discourses, etc.)

What do you need to do with the data in order to answer your research questions (e.g. data outcomes).



What do participants expect about how you use and share this data?

What permission do you need to re-use secondary data? Does your IRB consider secondary data use human subjects research?

What ethical considerations - beyond IRB - drive your work?

Are you working with vulnerable or marginalized populations?

Audience

Where will you share your work?

How does your audience define rigorous qualitative work?

Will you have to make the case for using (this type of) qualitative research?

What are the expectations for reporting the process of QDA?

Context

Do you have access to software and the needed devices?

Do you have time to learn a full-featured tool given your deadlines and goals?

Will you analyze in collaboration? What does that process look like?



Despite my neat categorization, these issues are deeply intertwined.

Thank you!

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