

Special international journal issue from the London conference on QSR software

The papers in this special issue of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology are selected from the last two years' conferences at the Institute of Education, University of London, on Strategies in Qualitative Research with QSR software. The special issue offers affirmation of the quality of this conference series, providing the variety and authority of papers necessary for a special issue of a refereed international journal. (The London conferences are reported in issues 14 and 17 of the QSR NSight newsletter.)

Editors of the special issue are Colm Crowley, Rom Harré and Clare Tagg, who open with an editorial reflection on "Qualitative research and computing: methodological issues and practices in using QSR NVivo and NUD*IST".

Following papers combine historical reflection on the origins and development processes of the software and results of research and reflections on its effects on methods. The collection begins with the plenary paper by Tom Richards, QSR's Chief Scientist, who used the plenary occasion to write for the first time "an intellectual history of NUD*IST and NVivo".

Linda Gilbert's plenary paper on her doctoral studies of software users follows. Titled "Going the distance: 'closeness' in qualitative data analysis software" it offers analysis of the impact of computing techniques on method and researcher, at three levels.

"The "tactile-digital divide" forces consideration of "what does closeness to data mean?". The "coding trap" highlights the value of analytical distance to balance closeness to data, and the value of purposefully moving between closeness and distance. The "metacognitive shift" achieves closeness to the powerful ways that software can transform data, but it achieves that closeness (through) reflective self-monitoring - a form of "distance," in that researchers "step back" to look at processes and decisions. As QDA software makes aspects of closeness more manageable, it challenges us to re-consider where and when closeness is of value, and where and when we need a little distance to provide perspective."

Practical accounts of projects follow. Pat Bazeley's paper describes through a real project the effects of the mixed methods techniques she teaches. Unlike previous publications, it is about

how a project evolved, from N3 to NVivo, giving detailed reflection on processes of designing and doing an integrated analysis of structured qualitative and quantitative data. From Harvard medical school, Michael Rich and Jennifer Patashnick from the VIA project describe their narrative research with audiovisual data: video intervention/prevention assessment (VIA) and NVivo. Editor Clare Tagg contributes a detailed account of project merging and its procedures in QSR software.

Was this a methods revolution? QSR co-founder, Lyn Richards argues that the glib assumption that methods have been overthrown hides the reality that the literature has yet to catch up with the new practices. An argument for such a special issue - and more conferences to generate these debates.

Dates are 8-9 May 2003 for the fourth conference at the Institute of Education, University of London, on Strategies in Qualitative Research with QSR software. Be there to be part of the debates - and the next publication. For information, see the conference website at: www.ioe.ac.uk/conferences/strategies.