Review #2: Data Coding

Marc Stephenson
California State University, Northridge
SED 600
**Introduction**

Data coding is an integral tool in analyzing any qualitative obtained during the research process. Unlike quantitative data, where traditional means of analysis such as the mean and standard deviation can be used, qualitative data is interpreted in a subjective manner. In order to conduct such an inductive analysis it is important to “construct some sort of framework for presenting key findings” (Mertler, 2006, p.125). After completing a sample coding exercise I was able to better understand how the process of data coding takes place

**Benefits of Coding Exercise**

The in-class coding exercise was extremely important in helping further understand how to apply qualitative research in a manner in which everyone can understand the data. I know understand the important of carefully analyzing the purpose of the particular type of qualitative data. For example, my group was asked to analyze an elementary education students responses to questions based upon a given scenario. As we began to discuss the task and to develop our “system of categorization” (Mertler, 2006, p.125), we ran into a problem. One of the members of the group began to develop a coding scheme that did not make sense to other members in the group. This was due to confusion as to what the data was representing. Until this confusion was solved, we could not begin to develop our categories for coding. Ultimately we needed to know what the problem was before any further work could be done.

The coding exercise was also beneficial in another practical sense. Mertler adequately described his process of developing his scheme and showed the categories he developed in figure 6.1 (Mertler, 2006, p. 126). There was even a sample of how he used
the codes in figure 6.2 (Mertler, 2006, p. 126). However, the actual process of
developing our own code and then determining how to use the code was extremely
helpful. When

*Weakness of Coding Exercise*

Even though the coding exercise was extremely important there was a weakness
that stood out in my mind. Though we worked in groups and developed a coding system
that we, as a group, agreed upon, and then proceeded to code our samples, we did not
have time to have our system evaluated. We also didn’t have a chance to see how the
other group with the same data coded and what their coding scheme was. This would
have provided a clearer picture of the process of developing a code and then coding. I
would have felt more confident in my ability to use this in my action research project.

*Application to Action Research*

Data coding can provide a simple way to concisely present non-numerical data.
This is extremely beneficial in regards using methodologies involving videotape, surveys
and field notes. As a scientist, I am used to looking for concrete data to support any
research that is done. The types of strategies mentioned above will most likely constitute
a large portion of any of the potential action research projects that I may embark upon.
By having a way to quantify qualitative data, data coding will provide me with a way to
present my findings concretely.

Coding also provides a way for the researcher to better analyze the data. In order
to develop a coding scheme the data at hand must be sorted through once. It is not
possible to code simultaneously, though so the data must be read, reread and reread
again. This will allow a familiarity with the data that could potentially lead to more thought out conclusions (Mertler, 2006).
Citations
