The Grounded Theory Method of Analysis in the Home/Work Study

Introduction to the Use of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory was one of the main analytic methods used to understand the phenomenon of deskilling amongst migrant women carers and their strategies for managing. It fit well with the aims of the study, which were to analyse the processes and outcomes of migrating for care and its effects on participants. Due to the complexity and range of issues amongst a group of participants who had similar problems, as well as the fact that this topic is an under-researched field of study—deskilling amongst migrant women—Grounded Theory was thought to be the most salient form of analysis. The process consisted of creating codes and categories, gleaning themes and then creating hypotheses about the participants’ experiences, along with the integration of experts’ opinions on the issues and a literature review. The hypotheses are available in the research brief and summary of findings at: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/homework/findings.htm. Specifically, the hypotheses were directly related to the title of the project: The Roles of Education, Literacy, and Learning in the Networks and Mobility Patterns of Migrant Carers. Through an ongoing process of comparing and contrasting the data, connections were made between these sets of relations.

Grounded Theory and Data Collection

Grounded Theory also fit well with the chosen data collecting methods, which are outlined in the document, “Summary of Data Collection Methods.” The analysis took place during the data collection period, and was thoroughly integrated in to all aspects of it, including an analysis of every interview and observation directly after they were given. In this way, each step of the data collection could feed in to the analysis. It consisted of three strands that utilised mixed methods, mainly qualitative, and these were triangulated for the sake of rigor; observations balanced out the things people said during interviews and either confirmed or contradicted their spoken viewpoints. Strand one consisted of an environmental scan of experts on specific issues surrounding the migrant carers, including a literature review. Strand two consisted of ethnographic methods (observations and indepth interviews) and a panel study to assess the range of responses migrant carers had towards migrating, caring, and working in Cumbria, particularly their networks and mobility patterns.
The observations took place over a 13-month period at their workplaces (care homes and during visits to elderly persons' homes) and in other places such as their own homes (birthday party) and libraries, and an ethnic food store. Interviews took place during the same period, with three interviews per participant (total of 93 interviews), which had a different focus at each stage. Lastly, strand 3 sought to test a model (one of the hypotheses developed) on workplace education and the kinds and levels of supports needed by migrant carers to persist in learning and education to advance. This included testing it on practitioners for feedback, creating a curriculum and workshop, evaluating the workshop, giving participants assessments (pre and post) and conducting a cohort analysis with a control group to see the larger effects of the intervention. All of these strands, but especially 1 and 2, were critical to the Grounded Theory analysis.

**About Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory is good for analysing data in exploratory studies, and in this case, migrant women's conditions of deskilling in the UK. Grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998) was used to provide insight into the factors influencing learning, use of literacies, mobility and networking. Grounded theory relies on the production of theoretical perspectives deriving from data (*ibid*). In this respect, the researcher focuses on the 'ground' – the data - and inductively generates more abstract concepts. To accomplish this, the researcher(s) needs to be 'flexible' and 'open to helpful criticism' (Strauss and Corbin 1998:5), whilst portraying 'appropriateness, authenticity, credibility, intuitiveness, receptivity, reciprocity, and sensitivity' (p.6). This style of research calls for creativity, closeness to the respondents and their claims, immersion in the field and an ability to interpret situations and statements (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Through ethnographic research and interviews, the participants discussed issues surrounding physical and social mobility, work relations, learning and using literacies and their own perceptions of the situations for migrant carers in the UK and their difficulties in each situation as well as their relations locally and abroad. The use of grounded theory allowed for the establishing of themes across the participants' data, thus underlining the crucial issues, such as little opportunity for upward mobility and skills being underused. However, data analysis and theory construction through grounded theory is an
‘evolving process’ (Charmaz 2000). Thus, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998) describe a procedure beginning with the use of analytical tools – such as finding key phrases or words in documents and experimenting with meanings –, open coding – ‘process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data’ (p.101) –, axial coding – creating subcategories and associating these with ‘properties and dimensions’ (p.123) – and selective coding – ‘integrating and refining the theory’ (p.143) by using categories and their associations with subcategories to create a type of case study of a particular sub-phenomenon. Throughout the process theoretical sampling is vital for the saturation of categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In order to achieve saturation, grounded theory analysis requires re-evaluation of concepts/themes/categories at varying stages. These themes and categories form eventually in to hypotheses, through an approach called, selective coding, which attempts to integrate the contexts of the participants and create a case of their particular issue. In this case, the migrant workers were struggling in contexts such as rural areas, the labour market and migration policies that were often limiting to them.

Limitations of Grounded Theory and Resolutions

Grounded Theory can be reductive in the search for general patterns across a group of people, and even the selective coding process does not fully engage the contextual issues outlined above: rurality, labour, and migration policies. Therefore portraiture, as another method was added to the selective coding process (enriching it) in order to provide a richer context for the struggles and strategies of the migrant carers, and the ways these deviated individually and according to different issues. For example, the portraiture could provide an indepth picture in to one woman’s experiences, of being a non-European carer stuck in the middle of migration policies in a way that the European carers were not. Additionally, each code was checked by the other team member and an informant. Finally, we did an evaluation of the entire process of Grounded Theory to detect gaps and areas for improvement.
Coding-Categories-Themes-Hypotheses

The procedure described above was applied to this research project and the data gathered. Initially, by using a literature review, interviews of experts in the fields of ageing, migration, care, ESOL, and others, history of the areas, statistical information and preliminary findings through ethnographic observations and interviews, we created codes and then categories and subcategories, namely 36 codes (open coding) and 4 broader, encompassing areas (networks, mobility, education and learning, literacies) and then we looked through 10 interview transcripts to see which codes were appearing in the participants’ interviews for the first round of interviewing. The purpose behind ‘theoretical sampling’ (Strauss and Corbin 1998) – a process of searching for concepts relating to ‘incidents, events or happenings’ (p.202) which appear frequently and which influence outcomes – over a period of time whilst building codes, is to start with creating many codes and then refining these ultimately to contribute towards theory building, or hypotheses. Finally, to ensure the codes fitted the data, the informant for the study gave input as to the validity of the codes and commented on them.

After using a categorization chart for these 10 transcripts in order to evaluate the frequency, intensity and duration of these codes, the number of codes dropped to 30, thus reflecting more accurately the conditions and events affecting the participants in their social mobility and learning. This phase of coding, axial coding, assisted in the relating of conditions and formation of an understanding of the situations affecting migrant carers while searching for explanations behind the phenomena studied. We also detected which codes were most popular amongst a set of 24 participants and highlighted which codes were rarely used and why. To assist with axial coding, 30 transcripts were coded by using ‘AtlasTi’ software to help in locating the codes in the transcripts and memoing. Thus, from an initial understanding that the participants were ‘stuck in the stepping stones’, we discovered that this was a repeated theme amongst participants that connected to causes and explanations as to why they felt, “stuck.” This process of locating themes that connected cause and effect, led to the selective coding process. In the phase of selective coding the categories were refined in to themes to assist with theory building. Alongside the exploration of issues
emerging from the interviews, patterns within grids were created across topics to establish
linkages – for example how social mobility is connected to literacies – and then the
environment was also examined, namely the care homes (maps) and the communities the
migrant carers reside in (through more grids) as well as a model of forces that impinged on
the participants’ livelihood. By focusing initially on knowledge gained by reviewing
literature, then focusing on the interviews, and following this examining the environments
where our participants live and work, these conditions fed into hypotheses on deskilling in
rural areas in conjunction to care and migration. Furthermore, demographic grids of the
participants were used to supplement the pattern grids on themes. Working concept maps
(diagrams) were also created to further analyse, the grids, maps, and coded data.

**AtlasTi**

One of the tools used in grounded theory are computer-based programmes. In this case,
textual analysis for the process of grounding data took place by using ‘AtlasTi’ software.
Through inputting interview transcripts and looking for themes in the first few interviews –
by using ethnographic and interview data and theory – and then refining the codes, AtlasTi
allows the coding process to take place and at a later stage make connections between
codes through the creation of ‘families’. This software also allows a form of quantitative
methodology to emerge through the listing of quotes (and thus numbering) under
categories, close to the ‘interplay between qualitative and quantitative’ discussed by Strauss
and Corbin (1998) as well as memoing. Thirty interview transcripts were inputted into
‘AtlasTi’ for the establishing of codes appearing most frequently in the interviews; these
interviews were taken from all three phases of interviewing.

Using AtlasTi made the research team more aware of the saliency of the codes but little
else. If anything it was the process, rather than the product which counted most. Criticisms
on using computer-assisted analysis are presented by Kathy Charmaz (2000). She argues
that computer analysis programmes allow ‘multiple research’ and ‘mapping relationships
visually on screen’ (Charmaz 2000:520) and that some of the dangers of placing too much
emphasis on ‘objectivist grounded theory’ (*ibid*) are superficiality and fragmentation which
isolate data from ‘our constructions and interpretations’ (*ibid*:521). For this reason, AtlasTi
was viewed as a mechanical tool that made use of grounded theory processes, relating data with theory and suppositions.

**Conclusion**

The process of going through Grounded Theory systematically was useful for raising consciousness amongst the research team about similar issues that skilled migrant professionals faced as carers attempting to advance. The constant reflexive comparisons/contrasts between the cases also allowed for intricate factors to emerge, which explained some of this phenomenon. Through Grounded Theory, the researchers gleaned hypotheses about the sets of relations between education, learning, literacy, mobility and networks. However, because Grounded Theory was unable to fully incorporate the rich contexts of the participants (how they acted under certain situations), a portraiture analysis was also used to gain a deeper understanding of their strategies and experiences, as well as a picture of their individual differences.

**References**
