GROUNDED THEORY REVIEW
An international journal

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December 2019

Grounded Theory Review, Vol 18 (Issue #1), 13-28

The online version of this article can be found at:

https://groundedtheoryreview.org

Originally published by Sociology Press

https://sociologypress.com/

Archived by the Institute for Research and Theory Methodologies

https://www.mentoringresearchers.org/

How Classic Grounded Theorists Teach the Method

Alvita Nathaniel

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Grounded theory upsets PhD students' world view. By the time they reach the classroom to learn grounded theory, research, to them, usually means deductively verifying established propositions. In quantitative research courses, they learned that they must design research that can be objectively judged to be reliable and valid; that research questions and related hypotheses (which remain static throughout a study) must include standardized measurements for strictly defined dependent and independent variables; that the pre-investigation literature review and synthesis must be comprehensive and phenomenon focused; that measurement of concepts must have internal and external validity; that the findings can be verified through replication; that exacting descriptions of sample selection, procedures, and instrumentation must be specified and approved by an ethics committee; and that significant findings are measured by strict statistical benchmarks. Imagine students' confusion when they begin to learn about classic grounded theory, a unique research method of inductive discovery, rather than deductive verification. A method in which the processes are standard, yet fluid; the phenomenon of study is not known beforehand; the sample selection changes as data emerges; the literature review follows data analysis; and the final product is tentative. The rules of quantitative research that they believed were carved in stone simply do not apply to grounded theory. Those of us who teach grounded theory understand that we must help students move toward a different way of thinking about research. I have taught grounded theory to PhD students for many years, with variable results, so I wanted to learn more about how others teach grounded theory. I reached out to expert classic grounded theorists around the globe, who shared their strategies. This paper is not a primer on classic grounded theory. It is simply a synthesis of teaching approaches that these professors and mentors use to guide students as they learn the grounded theory method.

Classic grounded theory is a unique inductive research method with language, rules of rigor, procedures, and a final product that is different from other research methods. It is highly misunderstood. Glaser and Strauss first described the method in the seminal work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967). Glaser further described and refined the grounded theory method over the intervening years and continues to write prolifically (Glaser, 1965, 1978, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002, rev. 2007, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2019, 1993, 1994, 2017; Glaser & Tarozai, 2007; Holton & Glaser, 2012)

Although grounded theory is one of the most frequently utilized research methods, many novice grounded theorists have struggled to find qualified mentors. A surprising number of universities have no experienced grounded theorists. Institutions often rely on

faculty who may understand the basics of research but are not familiar with the unique and essential aspects of classic grounded theory. I was struck by the magnitude of this problem after a grounded theory workshop at a large national research conference when a professor who taught a PhD-level qualitative research course asked, "But, grounded theory doesn't really have to produce a theory, does it? Can't it consist of a list of themes?" At another research conference I learned that PhD students at a prominent university were assigned to learn the different qualitative methods on their own and teach their classmates about them—truly a blind-leading-the-blind teaching strategy.

Even though grounded theory is elegant (once learned), it requires autonomy, an openness to emergence, and a respect for preconscious processing. Students must be guided. Barney Glaser recognized this problem of mentorless novice grounded theorists. To solve the problem, Glaser conducted small student-centered seminars in the North America, Europe, and Asia for many years. Researchers who attended these seminars are now the leading classic grounded theorists around the globe, some of whom conduct their own grounded theory seminars. This paper presents the teaching strategies of these experienced, multidisciplinary, international classic grounded theorists with one major caveat: while using these strategies, teachers and mentors must guide while strongly supporting students' autonomy.

Starting Out

All contributors to this paper agree that students must prepare by reading very specific primary source texts about grounded theory. Glaser wrote about the constant comparison method in 1964, but the method was first introduced through Glaser and Strauss's publications of the theories *The Social Loss of Dying* (1964), *Temporal Aspects of Dying* (1965b), and *Awareness of Dying* (1965a). After publication of these theories, Glaser and Strauss were asked to describe the research method they used to investigate dying processes in an institutional setting. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was a response to these inquiries. This revolutionary book laid out the foundation of a new, mostly inductive, approach to research. Subsequently, Glaser has written many books and papers further discussing the method. Several remodeled versions of grounded theory have been developed since the publication of *Discovery,* however each version utilizes different language, deviates far from Glaser and Strauss's method, and fails to capture its true essence. Therefore, when preparing for formal learning sessions, grounded theory students should begin by reading Glaser and Strauss's *Discovery of Grounded Theory* or Glaser's subsequent works, chiefly *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978) and *Doing Grounded Theory* (1998). Students, especially in academic settings, may also be asked to read published theories developed via the classic method prior to teaching sessions. Excellent examples of classic theory studies can be found in the online *Grounded Theory Review* or in grounded theory readers (Glaser, 1993, 1994; Holton & Glaser, 2012). Because it is confusing and can contaminate the research processes, students are discouraged from reading remodeled forms of grounded theory such those by Strauss and Corbin or Charmaz and research papers utilizing those methods. Students should also be discouraged from reading secondary sources prior to beginning their research projects.

Atmosphering

Barney Glaser's three-day intensive seminars always began with what he called, *atmosphering,* in which a comfortably dressed Glaser created an informal tone. Having attended a number of Glaser's seminars, Gynnild (2011) concluded that atmosphering is a conscious teaching act aimed at elevating participants' conceptual discovery through a set of "deliberate, sequentially spread actions" (p. 31). Further, through comparison of data from nearly a dozen troubleshooting seminars over a five-year period, Gynnild proposes that Glaser's use of atmosphering for conceptual discovery "refers to a holistic, experiential, exploratory, and yet grounded mentoring approach to the generation of new theory" (p. 32). Troubleshooting seminars were always conducted in a comfortable space where Glaser, seminar participants (troubleshootees), observers, and experienced grounded theorists (troubleshooters), sat at tables arranged in a circle. The atmosphere Glaser created was one of intimacy, safety, collegiality and occasionally "good vibes through playfulness" as noted by Gynnild. Participants were required to bring samples of their initial research data. Seminars were limited to 12 to 15 PhD candidates of various disciplines from around the globe. Seminars usually included participants from several continents with varied disciplines including nurses, physicians, mathematicians, sociologists, therapists, entrepreneurs, social workers, managers, teachers, journalists, and many others.

Judith Holton, who first met Glaser at one of his seminars in Sweden in 2003, has written about teaching and using classic grounded theory. She notes that Glaser began each seminar by emphasizing its pedagogy, which is grounded in the four basic principles of cognitive stripping, seed planting, preconscious processing, and realization (Holton, 2019). *Cognitive stripping* results in a disruption or dislodging of preconceptions, which enables emergence. *Seed planting* sets the stage for seminar participants to have later emergent realization, raising the potential for originality in emergent grounded theories. Glaser suggests the importance of *preconscious processing*, by which ideas "cook" somewhere beneath conscious thought—a natural process that speeds analysis. He calls grounded theory a delayed action phenomenon by which significant theoretical *realization* come with "growth and maturity in the data, and much of this outside of the analyst's awareness until it happens" (1978, p. 18). Holton suggests that realization seldom occurred at the seminars but was aided by the cognitive stripping and seed planting that did occur there.

Relying on a few handwritten notes in the seminars, Glaser introduced grounded theory. He shared established grounded theories in a way that allowed participants to understand that important patterns emerge from inductive data gathering. As they shared their budding research, participants, with seemingly little in common, became quickly and intensely engaged in the research interest of other participants, regardless of discipline. There seemed to be no professional competition or one-upmanship as is often the case in professional and academic institutions. An excitement about the possibilities of grounded theories created instant connections among participants. A Finnish entrepreneur student might become intensely engaged in discussions with an Australian midwife, an American mathematician, or a Filipino physician. It was exciting to see a group of disparate people eating dinner together or sitting around a fire and talking in an animated way about their research interests. By the end of the seminars, participants were energized and excited to begin their own grounded theory studies. Foster Fei was so interested in grounded theory

after his first seminar, for example, that he returned home and translated Glaser's *Basics of Grounded Theory* into Mandarin in 2009 and likewise, seminar attendee, Hans Thulesius, translated *Doing Grounded Theory* into Swedish in 2010.

The grounded theorists who contributed to this paper teach grounded theory in different venues. Tom Andrews and Helen Scott, for example, conduct short seminars similar to those of Glaser, as do Markko Hämäläinen, Judith Holton, and others. Andy Lowe, on the other hand, co-teaches a five-day course designed to help PhD researchers choose the research method most relevant to their own research interests. PhD physicians, Hans Thulesius and Toke Barfod, mentor medical students. A champion of atmosphering, Barfod meets with students in his home and discusses their research as they enjoy a cup of tea or glass of wine—pure atmosphering! Other contributors to this paper have taught grounded theory in academic settings, sometimes as part of integrated qualitative research courses. Regardless of the setting or type of students, all adopt a casual, student-centered approach while tailoring their teaching to the type of students.

Class sessions, even at the university level, are generally conducted as informal lectures, seminars and discussion. Slides, when used in a classroom setting, offer explanatory illustrations or jumping off points for discussion. For example, Andrews starts with examples in nature such as footprints in the snow. He moves to animal behavior and then human behavior and asks students summarize in a couple of words what they are picking up. Students are surprised to learn that what they are doing is a form of coding and that pattern identification and theorizing is a natural human process. Markko Hamalaien distributes envelopes with randomly selected comic frames of Donald Duck. With these, he gives participants different progressive tasks such as comparing and finding similarities, open coding, selective coding, memoing, and writing theoretical codes. Students learn various grounded theory procedures via this fun exercise. Thulesius connects with medical students by drawing comparisons to medical diagnoses. He explains that diagnoses are conceptual labels for what is going on in a person's body. Based on observations from many people across time, each diagnosis is a label (concept) that identifies a unique cluster of signs and symptoms (indicators) and a predictable course (pattern) over time. Thulesius uses this illustration as a comparison with grounded theories, which employ conceptual labels for what is going on at the social, rather than physical level. When introducing grounded theory, Stillman uses a combination of basic concepts, practice in class, and personal stories. She encourages optimism that following a strict process, students, themselves, could become classical grounded theorists. Regardless of the setting, atmosphering culminates in exchanges of ideas that give students a glimpse of a research process that, as Stillman expresses, can be life changing.

Teaching grounded theory to PhD nursing students in the academic setting, I often begin the first session with informal introductions and general conversation. While seeming to casually chat with a student seated beside me, I casually ask, "Have you ever had a troubling experience in nursing?" Invariably, the student will begin to talk about a troubling patient care situation. Other students begin to turn to our conversation and join in. Someone will say, "I will never forget…." and begin a heart-rending story about an experience. All in the room struggle for an opening to tell their stories. Or I might ask, "Did you ever sense that a patient's condition was deteriorating, but could not convince the

physician?" This, too, has happened to most nurses—and was identified as a basic social process in Andrews' theory of *Making Credible: A Grounded Theory of How Nurses Detect and Report Physiological Deterioration in Acutely Ill Patients* (2003). After a few minutes, I tell them that their experiences fit in with the theories of moral distress in nursing or making credible. Through their conversation, they have demonstrated the practical essence of theory grounded in the real-life experiences of people like themselves. Students are entranced by theories such as these that have personal meaning to them. These theories have what Glaser terms "grab." Once students have experienced the truth value of specific theories, they are eager to learn the grounded theory process.

Distinguishing Classic Grounded Theory from Other Methods

Early in the teaching/learning process, classic grounded theory must be distinguished from other research methods. Grounded theory is mostly inductive and is conceptual, rather than descriptive. As Odis Simmons, Andy Lowe, and Ólavur Christiansen point out, the very purpose of classic grounded theory differs from other methods. Whereas positivistic research seeks to confirm or reject propositions through deduction and qualitative methods might seek to describe phenomena in depth through thick description, the purpose of classic grounded theory is to conceptualize what is going on in people's lives—from their own perspectives—and to propose theories that can explain and predict processes. Christiansen articulates a common theme among contributing authors—that a hallmark of classic grounded theory is a researcher's openness that allows patterns to emerge from the systematic treatment of the data, recognizing that preconceived professional interests ultimately mask what is actually going on in the field of study. Further, Christiansen states that classic grounded theory is "normally unfit for use when the research question is preconceived—as it is in most cases."

Some students are confused by remodeled versions of grounded theory. In 1990, Strauss and Corbin wrote *Basics of Qualitative Research,* which proposed a form of grounded theory that deviated substantially from classic grounded theory, both in language and process. So different, in fact, that Glaser refers to this version as qualitative data analysis (QDA), rather than grounded theory. Another remodeling of classic grounded theory was Charmaz's (2000, 2014) constructivist approach, deviating both the spirit and language from the classic method. Students must understand they cannot maintain research integrity if they mix classic grounded theory with the philosophical assumptions, language, aims, or procedures of remodeled versions. Qualitative research textbooks often present a selected version of grounded theory or a messy amalgamation of classic with remodeled versions. Therefore, students should also be wary of secondary sources.

Resolving Misconceptions

Misconceptions should also be resolved before students move forward with research. Students must be acutely aware that classic grounded theory prohibits forcing *a priori* concepts derived from a particular paradigm into a grounded theory. First, there is a common misconception that symbolic interaction is the philosophical foundation of grounded theory. Neither Glaser and Strauss in 1967 nor subsequently Glaser (1965, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2001, 2002a, 2005a, 2005b) suggested that symbolic interactionism was the

philosophical foundation of classic grounded theory. Knowing exactly how the method was first developed, and impatient with what he considers an the "rhetorical wrestle," Glaser views grounded theory as an aphilosophical method. However, symbolic interactionism or any other ideology, he admits, can be a sensitizing agent if the researcher wishes. Holton and Walsh (2017), for example, conduct classic grounded theory studies through the lens of critical realism because they consider themselves critical realists. Another possibility is for students to rely on a philosophy of science, which does not distort emerging theories nor does it force an ideological paradigm on the research. For example, George Sanders' Peirce's original version of pragmatism offers a philosophy of science compatible with the epistemology and ontology of classic grounded theory without forcing unnecessary and incompatible dogmatic layers over the research process and product (Nathaniel, 2011). If the university requires inclusion of a philosophical foundation in students' theses or dissertations, professors and mentors should encourage students to select a philosophical foundation compatible with their own personal ontology, as in the case of Holton and Walsh, or one that fits grounded theory discovery within a philosophy of science.

A second misconception is that classic grounded theory is strictly a qualitative method. Glaser refers to grounded theory as a general method that can be used with different types of data. While most grounded theories are, indeed, conducted with qualitative data, the method may also be used with quantitative data. Students interested in quantitative grounded theory should read Glaser's *Doing Quantitative Grounded Theory* (2008).

Ensuring Common Language

Classic grounded theory has its own language. All contributors to this paper acknowledge that students must be introduced to grounded theory language and each term must be clearly explained, early on, so students can better understand their readings and teachers and students will be using a common language. Specific terms that have somewhat unique usage in the method require careful definition. Terms and phrases in grounded theory that are either unique to the method, likely misunderstood, or defined in a way that varies from common language include the following: category; core category; indicator; interchangeability of indicators; fracturing of data; constant comparison; memoing; emergence; fit, work, relevance, and modifiability (measures of rigor); substantive codes; theoretical codes; theoretical sampling: basic psychosocial processes; basic social-structural processes; tentative hypotheses; and others. Definitions for these terms, which are not necessarily self-explanatory, can be found in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and *Theoretical Sensitivity* (Glaser, 1978).

Interactive Teaching

Glaser is a master at interactive teaching. His grounded theory seminars were restricted to PhD candidates, who distributed and presented excerpts of their work during the seminar. The work students presented included thesis/dissertation proposals, raw data from interviews, memos, or emerging theories—at any stage of the thesis/dissertation process. Glaser, troubleshooters, and other participants discussed each person's work—assisting with conceptualizing, coding, and theorizing. Reflecting on this method of

teaching, Andrews says, "instruction in research should be experienced and not simply read from a book or taught through lectures only."

Although their approaches are varied, all contributors to this paper utilize active learning strategies similar to Glaser's, recognizing that students learn best by doing. Tina Johnston, a mathematics educator, developed a "nested strategy" of teaching by which she utilizes students' data or theories in progress; encourages small groups coding of data and memoing; clarifies misconceptions; codes along with students; and concludes with reflection. In the informal setting of his home, Barfod encourages medical students to discuss their work during which he interjects explanation when needed. Andy Lowe, on the other hand, distributes to management research students a 10-page syndicate exercise. The students work in small groups, using the raw data to discover substantive and emergent theoretical codes and to create memos. Lowe asks students to identify the main conceptual issues. This demonstrates how to move beyond narrative description toward conceptualization. Further, Lowe asks students to highlight the main conceptual issues that should be followed in future participant encounters—thus moving them toward theoretical sampling.

Reading and coding raw data is an excellent exercise to help students begin skill development. Higgins provides extracts of field notes she has written for students to code. Like many others contributing to this paper, Simmons, begins exercises with others' data. I present nursing students with excerpts from publicly available online blogs written by people with panic disorder—a dramatic way to grab students' attention. As Higgins points out, providing examples that have application to practice is helpful. Whether students have raw data, field notes, or excerpts, they are instructed to code the data line by line and to attempt to elevate their codes to the conceptual level, comparing one interview or field note with others, thus beginning to learn the constant comparative method. Simmons comments that students get excited when they identify and name their first concept. His students share their work and help each other between classes—enhancing everyone's skills and theoretical sensitivity. All agree that students very much enjoy this approach.

To enhance students' theoretical sensitivity, Simmons, Higgens, Barfod, Stillman, and other contributors assign students to read some published classical grounded theories such as those in Glaser's grounded theory readers or (instructor approved) completed theses or dissertations. The authors of published papers may present theories in a way that is not obvious to novice readers, for example, authors seldom, if ever, label the parts of the theory. They might not explicitly identify the concepts, nor identify them as substantive or theoretical. This gives teachers an opportunity to demonstrate how to identify the concepts, theoretical codes, tentative hypotheses, and most important—the core category. For example, the teacher might say something like, "This theory has three stages and a cutting point. Each stage has four properties. Let's identify the three stages, the major properties of each, and the cutting point."

Teaching Emergence

Emergence is a pillar of classic grounded theory that requires skill and vigilance. Everything emerges. The researcher cannot know beforehand what the theory will entail.

Emergence requires student autonomy and a very specific set of circumstances.

First, emergence requires that students are as free as possible from preconception, which can come from many sources including personal beliefs, professional dogma, forced ideology, or immersion in the literature surrounding the substantive area. Since preconceptions are often subconscious, Kara Vander Linden guards against preconceptions by organizing students in interdisciplinary groups. The groups discuss each student's data. As the students from different disciplines listen, they can easily identify the preconceptions of those in other disciplines.

Second, as Simmons comments, to allow for emergence, the research question must be broad enough to permit unexpected changes in direction. Unlike in quantitative research proposals, those wishing to properly conduct grounded theory studies cannot stipulate beforehand the dependent, independent, intervening, or any other variables or their relationships, because, as Simmons points out, grounded theory is not about what is relevant to the researcher, but to the people in the research area. Grounded theory is about categorizing patterns of behavior. Thus, the student must be careful to choose the correct sample. Since the theorist seeks to understand what is going on with a group of people, he or she will focus attention on that specific group. For example, the student who wishes to learn about the transition from freedom to prison should interview prisoners, not prison guards. Therefore, the teacher should guide students to craft grounded theory research questions that specify the sample population but allow for emergence. Good research questions for a grounded theory study might be so broad as to include language that asks simply 1) what is going on in a sample population, or 2) what is the main concern and how is it continually resolved in the sample population. These types of research questions allow for rich participant-driven data that can uncover previously unidentified processes.

Third, the spill question must strike at an area of relevance for participants without introducing researcher bias. Grounded theory seeks to conceptualize the problem as experienced and perceived by the participant, so it must be a problem for that person. The researcher chooses the substantive area and sample population and allows the main concern to emerge from the investigation. Few participants will have much to say in response to a problem that they do not perceive as a concern. For example, Amélia Didier, a PhD candidate in nursing at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, focused her research on interdisciplinary collaborative care teams in hospitals. When she began to interview hospital patients, she found that they had little interest or knowledge about interdisciplinary care teams. Whether or not a collaborative process took place in the interdisciplinary team was not a main concern of the patients and they had little to say about it. Patients' main concern was simply to receive good care and they had plenty to say about that. So, if participants seem confused by the question or have little to say in response, the student should reconsider the initial interview question that will encourage participants to talk about their own main concern.

Students should understand that crafting the spill question requires avoiding false assumptions that will derail the theory. The student should not assume, for example, that a parent loves a child, an alcoholic wishes to be sober, or a middle manager wishes to advance in the organization. Perhaps a parent despises his special needs child, an alcoholic

enjoys drinking, or the middle manager is comfortable in his position. If the posed question assumes a falsehood, spill cannot occur.

The interview question should consist of common language appropriate to participants' education and cultural group and be as free as possible from connotations that confuse meaning. Many terms in the common language have contradictory meanings and are easily misunderstood. On the other hand, the student should avoid professional jargon. Participants cannot meaningfully answer a question they do not understand. A good question should be clearly stated, simple, and free from confusing connotations.

Conducting an interview with one open-ended question is not easy. Before actually beginning the research process, I ask students to compose a grand tour or spill question and interview one person in their substantive area of research interest. Similarly, Andrews asks students to interview each other about an innocuous topic such as being a PhD student. He emphasizes that the interviewer's main job is to listen and follow leads. According to Andrews, this introduces students to conducting interviews without an interview guide or list of questions. This method helps students to begin thinking about writing field notes, rather than recording interviews.

Students should begin each interview with an open, non-judgmental question that encourages participants to tell their own stories. The question can begin with the words, "Tell me about…." or "What was it like when…." If the participant is comfortable, the story will flow. Unless it is culturally inappropriate, the student should make good eye contact and listen carefully without worrying about the next question. If the narrative stalls, the student can encourage the participant to continue by using statements such as, "Go on," "Tell me more about that," and so forth. Even though silence is difficult for novices, gaps in the narrative and periods of silence allow the participant to gather thoughts and give the impression that the student believes the story is worth waiting for.

Analysis

Analysis is an iterative process that begins with preconscious processing and includes writing field notes, coding the raw data word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence, fracturing the data through constant comparison, identifying incidents that indicate a concept, writing memos focusing on concepts and their indicators, recognizing the relationship between concepts, theoretical sampling, and sorting memos to complete a theory. Students worry that they will never reach this place. Gordon lets students know up front that the grounded theory process is iterative, and they should stay with it to allow concepts and their relationships to emerge. The key process, one that is difficult for students, is conceptualizing.

Conceptualizing. Christiansen describes conceptualization as the transformation of data such as pure descriptions or storytelling to substantive concepts and theoretical codes that explain what is going on in the recurrent solving of a main concern. Simmons tells students that a concept is merely a word or short phrase that does not interpret or add meaning to a pattern. Since most grounded theories revolve around a process, many concepts are verbs—often gerunds. All contributors to this paper teach students the value of finding gerunds to indicate a concept. Lowe teaches students that gerunding (see how it

works, Lowe created a gerund from the word *gerund*) consists of transforming the emerging code from a noun to a verb. He cites Chrisiansen's concept of making the most of opportunities--*opportunizing*. Once a concept is gerunded, it is much easier to investigate the dynamics. Again, citing Christiansen, Lowe offers that there might be several different categories of opportunizing such as perpetual, spasmodic, incremental, active, passive, and so forth. As data is analyzed categories and their indicators, dimensions, and properties will begin to emerge.

Lowe makes a point to ask students to clearly discriminate between data and conjecture from data and to identify different types of interview data. For example, baseline data is totally reliable and free from manipulation. Grounded theorists accept the truthfulness of the person being interviewed when baseline data is identified. Properline data, on the other hand, consists of institutionalization of fiction as a means of perpetuating reality. For example, a college Dean might recite the mission of the department in answer to a personal interview question. Vague data is a result of the participant being vague or economical with the truth, whereas interpreted data occurs when participants tells the interviewer what they think the interviewer wants to hear. Higgins reminds us about a lesson she learned from Glaser—to also code for what was not said, or code for absence.

Similar to other contributors to this paper, Lowe instructs students to very carefully read every sentence in the raw data, highlighting anything that might have the potential to reveal the latent patterns of the main concerns of the participants. He instructs students to fracture the data by breaking it up into logical categories and to analyze the cutting points such as when it begins and when it ends, what triggers it to begin or end, or what are the causes and consequences. Lowe also articulates what all classic grounded theorists understand—the interplay between substantive and theoretical codes. Theoretical codes conceptualize how substantive codes relate to each other, creating modeled, interrelated, multivariate hypotheses that account for resolving the participants' main concern. Lowe calls this procedure "tricky and often illusory" and warns that the student (and teacher) must be patient and not force them. After practicing selective coding and theoretical sampling, Simmons notes that students become familiar with Glaser's theoretical coding families as listed in *Theoretical* Sensitivity, by choosing ones that work by comparing, relating and fragmenting their memos into theoretical code categories. I often use a slide to demonstrate how the grounded theory process builds from the ground up and culminates in a set of interrelated tentative hypotheses. Hypotheses consist of concepts connected by theoretical codes (this comes before that, this causes that, and so forth) and theory consists of interrelated hypotheses. Simmons points out that the outline and memos students generate from the process will organize the write-up of the theory.

Delimiting. Good grounded theories are parsimonious. A solid classic grounded theory does not consist of thick description and is never a "theory of everything." Christiansen reminds us that instead of rejecting hypotheses by testing, generated theories are recurrently modified in order obtain better conceptual fit to what the data relate about the main concern of the participants being studied, and its recurrent solving. The core category is not merely the most pronounced concept, rather it sums up and explains the recurrent solving of participants main concern—what drives and directs participants' behavior as they repeatedly solve their main concern. For example, nurses whose main

concern involves being forced to participate in actions that violate their own personal values solve the problem through a lifetime of reckoning their decisions and actions. Thus, moral reckoning is the core category. Christiansen also notes that when the core category has been found, the rest of the study is ultimately delimited to what is most related to the core category. Anything that is not related is left out of the theory.

Memoing. Memoing is one of the most important processes of grounded theory, yet students find it difficult. Let's go back to the source to find out what Glaser has to say about memoing in *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978). Memos focus on concepts. According to Glaser, "Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding. Memos lead naturally to abstraction or ideation. Memoing is a constant process that begins when first coding data, and continues through reading memos or literature, sorting and writing papers or monographs to the very end. Memo-writing continually captures the 'frontier of the analyst's thinking' as he goes through either his data, codes, sorts, or writes" (p. 83). Glaser suggests that the grounded theorist should stop immediately and memo when ideas are sparked, regardless of what it interrupts. He lists four basic goals of memoing 1) to theoretically develop *ideas* (codes), 2) with complete *freedom* into a 3) *memo fund* that is 4) highly *sortable.* In terms of *ideas*, Glaser notes that a memo can be a sentence, a paragraph, or a few pages that exhausts the analyst's momentary ideation based on data—with "perhaps a little conceptual elaboration," but no logical elaboration (p. 84). Memos are aimed toward *ideas* that raise "description to a theoretical level through the conceptual rending of the material" (p. 84). Codes conceptualize the data, while memos serve as a means of "revealing and relating by theoretically coding the *properties* of the substantive codes" (p. 84). When he speaks of *freedom* Glaser gives the grounded theorists permission to write without constraints of proper rules of writing, claiming that "proper writing tends to freeze theoretical renditions prematurely" (p. 85). This freedom allows the analyst to work faster by communicating ideas without having to think about precious writing rules. When teachers have access to students' memos, they should remember Glaser's advice about memo writing. Glaser suggests that a large *memo fund* should consist of all memos and writings from the grounded theory study. In addition to building the theory, these memos can yield many lectures, papers, and books. For example, Glaser and Strauss's initial study of dying processes in the hospital setting yielded several monographs that continue to be relevant in today's health care environment. The final write-up of a grounded theory is usually done through an extensive process of memo *sorting*. Sorting requires a cognitive process that allows for emergent meanings that cannot be known beforehand. Therefore, sorting cannot be done via electronic programs. Glaser suggests that each memo should be introduced by a title which indicates the category or property it is about. In addition, any other concepts or theoretical relationships mentioned in a memo should be highlighted to make sorting more efficient.

Contributing authors offered a few strategies they use when teaching about memos. Johnston stresses to students that coding is not what we use to form theories—but memos are. Simmons and Gordon ask students to practice memoing. Simmons asks students to write some practice memos, which consist of concepts and the relationships between them, stressing that memos are not mere descriptive summaries of the data. Working with students that are farther along in the process, Gordon asks students to practice sorting,

organizing and re-organizing theoretical memos to build a core category. Lowe offers students a structure for memos, which includes the title of the memo, a summary of substantive issues and their properties that are embedded in the text, substantive categories, conceptual indicators, emergent theoretical issues, issues to be clarified in future interviews, initial conjectures not based on data, and links with this memo and other memos. As Johnston suggests, a grounded theory emerges when well-written memos are properly sorted, highlighting theoretical relationships among concepts and categories.

Conclusion

While grounded theory is one of the most frequently used methods of research, teachers must use careful strategies to help students maintain integrity of their resultant theories. Classic grounded theory has unique language, criteria for rigor, and procedures that are inviolate and cannot be mixed with other iterations of grounded theory. Classic grounded theory is paradoxically simple, yet complex. Teaching strategies as demonstrated by Glaser, himself, and communicated by expert grounded theorists can assist teachers to help students understand the basic principles and procedures of the method.

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