EDCP 789B:
Grounded Theory Approach to Qualitative Research

Fall 2009

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Time: Mondays 1:00pm-3:45pm
Location: Benjamin 0202
Office hours: By Appointment
email class reflector: edcp789B@umd.edu

Course Description

This term [grounded theory] is often used in a nonspecific way to refer to any approach to developing theoretical ideas (concepts, models, and formal theories) that begin with data. Grounded theory methodology, however, is a specific, highly developed, rigorous set of procedures for producing formal, substantive theory of social phenomena. This approach to the analysis of qualitative data simultaneously employs techniques of induction, deduction, and verification to develop theory. (Schwandt, 2001, Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, p. 110)

Grounded theory research is increasingly found in educational research, including the fields of higher education, student affairs, and counseling. At the same time that grounded theory studies have become more prevalent in the research base, understanding and development of grounded theory as a research methodology continues to evolve. First developed and described by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their seminal 1967 text, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, the purpose of grounded theory research is to build an inductively derived theory grounded in and informed by the area under investigation. More recently, Corbin described grounded theory procedures as also transferable to other methodologies. However, as Bryant and Charmaz (2007) cautioned, the temptation is great to simply recite the “grounded theory mantra” which is “theory emerges from data” (p. 32). Although few would argue with this statement, our readings and discussions in this course will make clear that grounded theory research is much more complicated than this and demands a far deeper understanding of the historical and philosophical foundations, evolutionary trends and shifts, and key concepts and characteristics to effectively put this methodological approach to use. In addition to providing an overview of grounded theory research, students in this course will have an opportunity to experience the application of grounded theory concepts and methods to practice through the development of a grounded theory project.
Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

From my perspective, acquiring the skill and understanding for conducting qualitative inquiry has three dimensions: reading, reflecting, and doing. Preferably, all three are done simultaneously so that outcomes of each continuously interact. (Glesne, 2006, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, p. ix)

The primary objective and outcome of this course is to develop an understanding of grounded theory research, both the philosophical underpinnings and associated methods. Specific outcomes include:

- To understand the strengths and limitations of grounded theory research and when it is most appropriate to use.
- To gain experience in developing research questions appropriate to grounded theory inquiry, particularly in counseling and higher education and student affairs contexts.
- To become familiar with the specialized literature and research related to grounded theory approach to research.
- To gain experience in conducting grounded theory research including writing research questions, collecting data, coding data, analyzing data through constant comparison, memoing, and generating emerging theory.
- To explore issues involved in conducting grounded theory research and develop a reflexive awareness of contemporary issues in data analysis, interpretation, and representation.
- To think critically about the nature and purpose of qualitative research, one’s perspective on what it means to inquire, and who you are as a researcher.
- To develop skills as a consumer of qualitative research and ability to critique grounded theory studies.

Academic Integrity

I expect that all of your work will be characterized by academic integrity and honesty. You are encouraged to become familiar with the University's policy on academic dishonesty, as this policy applies to our class as well as to all others. One aspect of this expectation is that your work will be referenced and documented appropriately. If you have any questions at all about proper documentation, you should talk with me. Any students who violate standards of academic honesty (in written work, research, etc.) will be held accountable through University of Maryland procedures.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html.

The Code prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper
for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. The University Senate requires that students include the following signed statement on each examination or assignment: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (or assignment)." Compliance with the Code is administered by a Student Honor Council, which strives to promote a "community of trust" on the College Park campus. Allegations of academic dishonesty can be reported directly to the Honor Council (314-9154) by any member of the campus community.

All written work should be completed using the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 6th edition. (This is the newest version, just out, and while very similar to the 5th there are some important differences.)

Academic Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities

In both compliance with and in the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I would like to work with you if you have a disability that is relevant to your work in this course. If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.

Religious Observances

The University System of Maryland policy on religious observances provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs; students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. I will be happy to work with you if class meetings or assignments conflict with your religious practices.

Required Texts


Additional Required Reading

The following additional articles are required course readings (they are identified on the course outline with an asterisk*):


**Course Requirements**

*Some set great value on method, while others pride themselves on dispensing with method. To be without method is deplorable, but to depend on method entirely is worse. You must first learn to observe the rules faithfully; afterwards, modify them according to your intelligence and capacity.* (Lu Ch’ai, 1701, *The Tao of Painting*)

**Class Participation**

As a graduate seminar course, active participation is expected in all class meetings. This requires preparation for each class through reading at enough depth to actively participate in discussions. The success of our mutual learning from one another depends upon preparation and active participation in all aspects of the course and timely completion of required work. Please pace yourself carefully to meet the expectations of the course. Getting behind will seriously impact your ability to successfully complete the requirements of the course and, as you will see, also impact the success of your peers. Work that is late, without documented medical excuse or extraordinary circumstance, will be accepted but docked one point per day late. Similarly, incompletes will not be given except in a case of extraordinary circumstances.

Participation includes active engagement in whole group discussions, small work groups (more about these later), and presentations. I appreciate the presence of diverse learning styles; and I encourage you to stretch beyond your comfort zone as you think about what you can both learn and contribute from active participation in multiple contexts.
**Grounded Theory Class Project**

I think it is unrealistic (and not good modeling) to expect that each of you can complete a grounded theory research project during the brief time frame of one semester. However, the experience of gaining practice in characteristically grounded theory methods is central to your learning about grounded theory. Therefore, we will engage in a small scale research project as a class. Depending on the overall size of the class, we will create 2-3 “research teams” for the purposes of investigating our topic. Work will be done individually, as a member of your research team, and as a class as a whole. The components of this project are detailed below. Please note, that as a group project, individual success is dependent upon others in the class. I have structured the design of the project as a semester-long one with specific activities building upon the previous. Getting behind on these assignments and activities will not only impede your own learning and progress but that of your classmates.

This project will provide you with an opportunity to experience and practice the concepts and issues discussed in the readings and in class by designing and conducting a small research project. The “work” of the class is in all the steps taken to successfully conduct such a project, rather than a big end-of-semester paper so please plan your time and attention accordingly. Every step of the research process involves decisions that the researcher must make and justify. Your project will provide you with experience in thinking through these decisions and developing justifications. Finally, the project will provide you to some exposure to working on a research team.

In order to provide some initial structure to this assignment, and in an effort to identify a topic that is presumably of interest to all (or at least a topic to which those from diverse educational fields can relate), I have determined the focus of our inquiry:

*Transformative learning.* From here, our work together begins!

**Transformative Learning Essay**

In this introductory essay please describe a transformative learning experience that stands out for you. You might detail the actual learning experience as well as the factors that contributed to this learning process as transformative. [This essay should be approximately 5-7 pages in length.]

This essay becomes our first chunk of data. Please note that you will be asked to share your essays with others in the class.

**Due:** September 14

**Transformative Learning Interviews and Transcriptions**

After we develop interview questions as a class, each of you will use the mutually constructed interview protocol to interview another member of your research team. Please record this interview and then transcribe it verbatim. A word to the wise, for those of you who have not had experience
transcribing before, this takes time. If you are fast on the keyboard, plan to spend at least 3 hours transcribing an hour long interview.

**Due:** Complete interviews by October 5th and complete transcription by October 12th

**Coding Data**

Once the transcripts are generated, coding begins. Mirroring the analytic process detailed in our readings, each student will code a minimum of two transcripts and each transcript will be coded by two people. As a class, we will work out the details and procedures involved. However, this activity will involve individual coding and analysis as well as comparing codes with other members of your research team. As you will learn, coding and memo writing occur simultaneously so you will also engage in a process of memo writing.

**Due:** Initial Coding and Memos, October 19; Results of Focused Coding and Initial Theoretical Coding and Memos, November 9

**Presentations**

During the final class session, each research team will prepare and deliver a 30 minute presentation on their emerging grounded theory of transformative learning. This should be structured as though you were presenting a research paper at a scholarly conference (you do not need to write the paper but should develop substantive content via power point slides or some other presentational platform). The primary focus of the presentation should be on your analytic process and findings, consistent with grounded theory research.

After each research team has presented, then we will spend time comparing the emerging theories and exploring commonalities and points of divergence.

**Due:** December 7th

**Final Paper**

The final paper for this class is reflective in nature. Please explore and address what you have learned about yourself as a researcher and about the process of conducting grounded theory during the course of the semester. In particular, please comment on the issues you encountered while conducting your project, what you see as the strengths and limitations of grounded theory inquiry, what you still have questions about, what you learned from working together as a team, and an assessment of your own contributions. This paper should be approximately 10-12 pages in length.

**Evaluation and Grading**

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Transformative Learning Essay</td>
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<td>Research Project</td>
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CourseEvalUM Fall 2009

Your participation in the evaluation of courses through CourseEvalUM is a responsibility you hold as a student member of our academic community. Your feedback is confidential and important to the improvement of teaching and learning at the University as well as to the tenure and promotion process. CourseEvalUM will be open for you to complete your evaluations for fall semester courses between Tuesday, December 1 and Sunday, December 13. Please go directly to the website (www.courseevalum.umd.edu) to complete your evaluations starting December 1.
Course Outline

Week 1
August 31
Introductions to the Course; Review Syllabus and Requirements; and
Introductory Discussion of Grounded Theory

Week 2
September 7
Labor Day Holiday-No Class

Week 3
September 14
Introductions and Pathways to Grounded Theory

Reading: Charmaz-Chapter 1; *Corbin & Strauss-Introduction (pp. 1-17);
Bryant & Charmaz-Chapter 3 (Star)

Guest: Dr. Jeannie Brown Leonard

Due: Transformative learning essay

*form research teams and exchange of essays

Week 4
September 21
Historical and Philosophical Foundations

Reading: Bryant & Charmaz-Chapters 1 (Bryant & Charmaz), 9 (Kelle), and 22
(Green et al.); *Parks Daloz on Transformative Learning

*developing research questions

Week 5
September 28
Gathering Data

Reading: Charmaz-chapter 2; *Fontana and Frey; *Edwards & Jones
*develop interview questions

Week 6
October 5
Developing Grounded Theory

Reading: Bryant & Charmaz-chapters 4 (Glaser) and 5 (Stern); *Fassinger

Due: Completed interviews with one another
Week 7  
October 12  
**Data Analysis: Coding**  
*Reading:* Charmaz-chapter 3; Bryant & Charmaz-chapter 14 (Wiener); *Torres  
  
*Due: transcriptions of interviews*  
*exchange transcriptions so that each transcript is reviewed by 2 people and each student codes 2 interview transcriptions  

Week 8  
October 19  
**Data Analysis: Coding and Memo Writing**  
*Reading:* Charmaz-chapter 4; Bryant & Charmaz-chapter 8 (Dey) and 12 (Lempert)  
  
*Due: Initial Coding and memos*  
*compare initial coding and memos with research team  

Week 9  
October 26  
**Theoretical Sampling and Theoretical Coding**  
*Reading:* Charmaz-chapter 5; Bryant & Charmaz-chapter 11 (Morse)  
  
*continue coding for categories and more abstract conceptualizations—what is the analytic direction of initial coding?  

Week 10  
November 2  
**Theorizing and the Analytic Process**  
*Reading:* Charmaz-chapter 6; Bryant & Charmaz-chapter 13 (Holton); *Brott & Myers  
  
*comparing codes and categories with class and developing the analytic story  

Week 11  
November 9  
**Taking Stock of Where We Are!**  
*Reading:* Bryant & Charmaz-chapter 24 (Mruck & Mey)  
  
We will use this class to take stock of where we are in our research project. Time might be spent on questions at this point in the process, reflecting on the process, as a means of group “member checking”—comparing and contrasting codes and categories among the research teams; or continued small group work to make progress on analysis.  
  
*Due: Results of Focused and Theoretical Coding and Memos*
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<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Writing: Interpretation and Representation</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 16</td>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong> Charmaz—chapter 7; Bryant &amp; Charmaz—chapter 21 (Denzin); <em>Corbin &amp; Strauss (pp. 275-295)</em></td>
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<td><em>developing grounded theory</em></td>
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<th>Week 13</th>
<th>Criteria for Evaluation</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 23</td>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong> Charmaz—chapter 8; Bryant &amp; Charmaz—chapter 6 (Kearney)</td>
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<th>Week 14</th>
<th>Connecting Grounded Theory with Theoretical Perspectives/Research Approaches</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 30</td>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong> Bryant &amp; Charmaz—skim chapters 17, 18, 19, and 20. Pick one of these chapters to read carefully and come prepared to discuss the focus of your chapter.</td>
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<th>Week 15</th>
<th>Presentations of Grounded Theories of Transformative Learning</th>
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<td>December 7</td>
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<th>Week 16</th>
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<td><em>Due:</em> Final Papers due by 4pm Monday December 14th</td>
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[Jones, August 2009]