GROUNDED THEORY DESIGNS IN QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

"Grounded Theory is the study of a concept! It is not a descriptive study of a descriptive problem" (Glaser, 2010).

"Most grounded theorists believe they are theorizing about how the world *is* rather than how respondents see it" (Steve Borgatti).

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Outline

• Definition of grounded theory

• When do you use Grounded Theory?

• Types of grounded theory designs

•What are the steps in conducting Grounded Theory Research?

• How do you evaluate Grounded Theory Research

• Examples

• A ***grounded theory design*** is a *systematic*, qualitative procedure used to generate a *theory* that explains, at a broad *conceptual level*, a *process*, an *action*, or an interaction about a substantive topic (Creswell, 2008).

• The phrase "**grounded theory**" refers to theory that is developed **inductively** from a corpus of data.

• ''Grounded Theory is the most **common, widely used,** and **populer analytic technic** in qualitative analysis'' (the evidence is: the number of book published on it) (Gibbs, 2010).

• It is mainly used for **qualitative research**, but is also applicable to other data (e.g., quantitative data; Glaser, 1967, chapter VIII).

Development of the Grounded Theory

• Two sociologists, **Barney G. Glaser** and **Anselm L Strauss**, developed grounded theory in the late 1960s.

• University of California, San Francisco, Medical Center with patients who were terminally ill- recorded and publicized their methods of research.

• Glaser and Strauss developed a pioneering book that expounded in detail on their grounded theory procedures, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory(1967).*

When do you use Grounded Theory?

• when you need a **broad theory or explanation** of a process.

• especially helpful when current theories about a phenomenon are either **inadequate** or **nonexistent** (Creswell, 2008).

• when you wish to study **some process**, such as how students develop as writers (Neff, 1998) or how high-achieving African American and Caucasian women's career develop.

Methods

The basic idea of the grounded theory approach is to **read a textual database** and **"discover"** or **label variables** (called **categories, concepts** and **properties**) and their **interrelationships**.

The data do not have to be literally textual -- they could be **observations of behavior,** such as **interactions and events in a restaurant**. Often they are in the form of field notes, which are like diary entries.

Data Collection

- Interviews
- Observations
- Documents
- Historical Records
- Vidoetapes

Conducting a Grounded Theory Study

• Rather than beginning by researching and developing a hypothesis, the first step is ***data collection***, through a variety of methods (This contrasts with the scientific perspective that how you generate a theory).

• From the data collected, the **key points are marked** with a series of ***codes,*** which are extracted from the text.

• The codes are grouped into similar ***concepts*** in order to make them more **workable**.

• From these concepts, ***categories*** are formed, which are the basis for the creation of a ***theory***.

Conducting a Grounded Theory Study

- **Decide** if Grounded Theory design best addresses the research problem

- Identify a **process** to study

- Seek **approval** and access

- Conduct **theoretical sampling**

- **Code** the data

- Use **selective coding** and develop the theory

- Validate your **theory**

- Write a grounded theory **research report**

Types of grounded theory designs

There are three dominant designs for grounded theory:

1.Systematic design (Strauss and Corbin: 1998)

A systematic design in grounded theory emphasizes the use of **data analysis** steps of **open**, **axial** and **selective coding**, and the development of a logic paradigm or a visual picture of the theory generated. In this definition, three phases of coding exist.

Data Analysis

1. ***Open coding:*** The **data** are divided into **segments** and then **scrutinized** for commonalities that reflect ***categories or themes.***

   After the data are ***categorized,*** they are further examined for ***properties*** that characterize each category.

   In general, ***open coding*** is a process of **reducing the data to a small set of themes** that appear to describe the phenomenon under investigation.

   Coding: is the process of naming or labeling things, categories, and properties.

   Example:

   Pain relief is a major problem when you have arthritis. Sometimes, the pain is worse than other times, but when it gets really bad, It hurts so **bad**, you don't want to get out of bed. You don't feel like doing anything. Any relief you get from **drugs** that you take is only **temporary or partial**.

One thing that is being discussed here is **PAIN**. Implied in the text is that the speaker views pain as having certain **properties**, one of which is **INTENSITY**: it varies from a little to a lot. (*When is it a lot and when is it little?*).

When it hurts a lot, there are **consequences**: don't want to get out of bed, don't feel like doing things (*what are other things you don't do when in pain?*).

In order to solve this problem, you need **PAIN RELIEF.** One **AGENT OF PAIN RELIEF** is drugs (*what are other members of this category?*).

Pain relief has a certain **DURATION** (could be temporary), and **EFFECTIVENESS** (could be partial).

Examples of Purpose Statement and Research Question for Grounded Theory

(Mapping the Process: An Exemplar of Process and Challenge in Grounded Theory Analysis)

• Article discuss **theoretical considerations** and use a **visual model** to illustrate how they applied **grounded theory** to this complex and sensitive topic.

• It focus on **the analytic process** involved in implementing the **key methods** and **concepts of grounded theory** (Glaser & Strauss, 1969; Strauss & Corbin, 1995), while using examples from findings to illustrate methodological points.

• They conducted **a 3-year study of the referral and placement of Black** (various ethnicities, such as African American, Haitian) and **Hispanic** (various ethnicities, such as Cuban, Nicaraguan) **students in special education programs in a large urban school distric**t.

Example of the purpose statement

• "...**the purposes of the project** were (a) to investigate whether and, if so, how, the **processes** used to identify, assess, and **place students in high-incidence special education programs** contribute to the **overrepresentation phenomenon**; and (b) to identify referral and placement decision-making processes that successfully mitigate **overidentification and overrepresentation** while also providing beneficial educational outcomes for students "(Beth Harry, Keith M. Sturges, and Janette K. Klingner, 2005).

• **The research was conducted in a funnel-like process over three phases**

- *Phase 1 (September-April, Year 1)*

  - They **collected data** on the school district's placement rates and policies by examining relevant statistics and written documents. It was conducted a total of **71 audiotaped interviews**.
  - The purpose of these interviews was to gain the views of key players regarding how the placement process worked for minority children and why overrepresentation exists.
  - The central question, common to all interviews, was simply," **What do you think explains overrepresentation?**

- *Phase 2 (April, Year 1-June, Year 2)*

  - They selected **2 teachers** and their students from each school for more extensive **data collection,** consisting of **8-12 observation**s in each classroom along with interviews and informal conversations with the teacher

- *Phase 3 (September, Year 3-End of Project)*
  - They conducted **in-depth case studies** of 12 students.

"Constant Comparative Data Analysis" :

The researcher **moves back** and **forth** among data collection, and gradually advanced from coding to conceptual categories, and thence to **theory development**.

In Glaser and Strauss's language, the "basic, defining rule for the **constant comparative method**" is that, while coding an incident, the researcher should compare it with all previous incidents so coded, a process that **"soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category "**.

For example, in data collected for article, a teacher, distressed about the large number of children in her class, exclaimed, **"Oh, no! So many kids!"**

They **compared the properties** of the situation to which she was referring with a statement by another teacher: **"There are 23 [exceptional education] kids lined up at my door."**

Noting that both teachers were complaining about the number of children they were expected to teach, authors assigned both statements the code **Class Size**.

2. Axial coding:

This step is to group the **discrete codes** according to **conceptual categories** that reflect commonalities among codes.

Strauss and Corbin refer to this as **"axial coding,"** reflecting the idea of clustering the open codes around specific **"axes"** or points of intersection.

It is important to note that, when engaging in **categorizing/axial coding**, these **properties** are being identified through the interpretive lens of the researcher, who is already beginning to abstract meaning from the data.
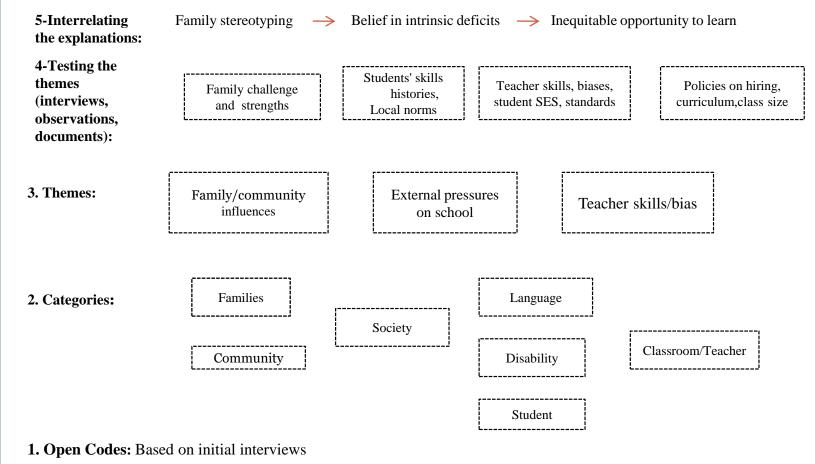
For example, they decided that the code **Class Size** fit into a category of codes that they called **Classroom/Teacher,** which referred to classroom issues that were challenging to the teacher.

3- Selective coding:

Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to the third analytic level as "**selective coding**," meaning that at this point the researcher treats the **various code clusters in a selective fashion**, deciding how they relate to each other and **what stories they tell**. Thus the analyst" constructs... **a set of relational statements** that can be used to explain, in a general sense, what is going on"

6. Theory:

Influences- A complex set of **negative influences** contribute to the **overrepresentation of minorities** in special education. Predominant contributors are the assumption of intrinsic deficit and the requirement for a disability categorization; inequitable opportunity to learn, resulting from poor teacher quality in lower-SES schools and higher standards in higher-SES schools; negative biases against families perceived as dysfunctional; external pressure from high-stakes testing; and subjectivity in referral and assessment practices

5-Interrelating the explanations:

Family stereotyping $\rightarrow$ Belief in intrinsic deficits $\rightarrow$ Inequitable opportunity to learn

4-Testing the themes (interviews, observations, documents):

| Family challenge and strengths | Students' skills histories, Local norms | Teacher skills, biases, student SES, standards | Policies on hiring, curriculum,class size |

3. Themes:

| Family/community influences | External pressures on school | Teacher skills/bias |

2. Categories:

Families

Society

Community

Language

Disability

Classroom/Teacher

Student

1. Open Codes: Based on initial interviews

2.Emerging design (Glaser: 1992)

Glaser stresses the importance of letting a **theory emerge** from the **data** rather than using **specific, preset categories.**

3.Constructivist approach (Charmaz: 1990, 2000, 2006)

The **constructivist approach** has been articulated by **Kathy Charmaz.** She focuses on the importance of meanings **individuals attribute** to the focus of the study. Applying **active codes**, the researcher looks at the **participants' thoughts, feelings**, **values, viewpoints, assertions** etc. rather than gathering **facts** and **describing acts**.

How do you evaluate Grounded Theory Research?

When evaluating the quality of a Grounded Theory study:

• Is there an obvious connection between the categories and the raw data?
• Is the theory useful as a conceptual explanation for the process being studied?
• Does the theory provide a relevant explanation of actual problems and a basic process?
• Is the theory modified as conditions change or the researcher collects additional data?

• **Ask about the process of research:**

• Is a theoretical model developed or generated? Is the intent of this model to conceptualize a process, an action, or an interaction?
• Is there a central phenomenon (or core category) specified at the heart of this model?
• Does the model emerge through phases of coding? (e.g. initial codes to more theoretically oriented codes or from open coding to axial coding to selective coding)?

Criticism

Critiques of Grounded Theory have focused on **its status as theory** (what is produced really 'theory'?), on the notion of **'ground'** (why is an idea of 'grounding' one's findings important in qualitative inquiry—what are they 'grounded' *in*?) and on the claim to use and **develop inductive knowledge**. Thomas, G. and James suggest that it is impossible to free oneself of **preconceptions in the collection** and **analysis of data** in the way that Glaser and Strauss say is necessary(Thomas, G. and James, D. (2006)

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