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EDITOR'S NOTE

Grounding Research, Theory, and Practice

Vivian B. Martin, Central Connecticut State University

Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication (TJMC) was started as a venue for writing and research about teaching journalism and mass communication in traditional and nontraditional ways. With this, our second issue, the journal is moving closer to what we had envisioned, one with essays integrating video and other multimedia to help demonstrate teaching and pedagogical ideas, as well as peer-reviewed research on topics related to the classroom, such as research on motivating students to read long-form works, Twitter pedagogy, and an applied theoretical discussion on using dialogic public relations in PR education. The mix of offerings, though an exciting realization of some vague ideas we editors had more than a year ago, only inspires us to push forward with more possibilities for thinking, writing, and researching about the scholarship of teaching and learning.

What we need in the next phase is greater use of research methods that make strong connections among research, theory, and work in the classroom. To accomplish this, prospective contributors should think more boldly about the many ways of knowing and tap into some of those methods for their research. While much of the most valued research in our field still tilts toward quantitative analysis, journals in the field increasingly put out calls for a wide range of methods. Yet some of the methods that are particularly useful for linking research, theory, and practice do not show up in the journals often. The issue is not so much about quantitative vs. qualitative data, though that tension still dogs us. Mixed-methods studies allow quantitative and qualitative data to complement one another. From the standpoint of practical research, however, statistics and compelling quotes, even when combined, still don't come so readily off the page to help link research, theory, and practice.

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) that TJMC hopes to advance can benefit from some of the methods used more in practical fields, such as education, nursing and health studies, social work, and information technology. Of particular usefulness are methods that study a problem in real time. In these realms, experiments, control groups, and the undergraduate psychology student looking for extra credit–the backbone of the kind of studies that typically pass the "scientific" sniff test–are not valued as much as data from what is really happening on the ground.

Action research, for instance, is a method that allows researchers to design projects that intervene to address a problem and then do further research on the outcomes of the intervention. Action research (the Center for Collaborative Action Research has helpful resources) is especially popular in education research, where teacher-researchers enlist colleagues in participatory projects to address a problem (in reading, writing, or math, for example). Action research seems like a natural for assessment projects; yet our disciplines do not produce much of it. A search in the Communication and Media Studies database through EBSCOHOST, which includes abstracts and full-text articles from more than 600 journals in communication, linguistics, writing, and related education fields, retrieves studies such as an interesting project

intended to teach university design students how to turn text into pictures (McAuley, 2010), but this, and a few other media projects, are out of Australia.

Surely, one reason for the limited use of action research has to do with the ways in which established doctoral programs train researchers and the adherence to traditional forms of theses. Levin (2003) found doctoral training in action research is becoming more common as conceptions of knowledge change and the demand for practical research increases. Again, I should note, he is writing from an Australian perspective. Nevertheless, some of his observations about research training ring true to me as someone who helps mentor doctoral students who are doing dissertations using one of my methods of choice, grounded theory.

Grounded theory was originally developed to build a working theory about an ongoing concern or problem through a series of linked concepts. The concepts are based on the data, which can be interviews, documents, video–whatever is relevant. The method has a series of coding and analytical procedures performed simultaneously with data collection. Barney Glaser, co-discoverer in the 1960s of the method with fellow sociologist Anselm Strauss, describes grounded theory as a "study of a concept." Listen to Glaser as he discusses "credentializing," a process necessary for legitimacy in our society in fields ranging from beautician to medical doctor. A grounded theory examines all the processes and dimensions through which credentializing comes into being. All grounded theory studies have a core concept or variable that integrates smaller ones. As Glaser discusses in the video clip, "supernormalizing," which comes from sociologist Charmaz's work on people returning to routines after heart attacks (1993), explains a process recognizable to anyone who has had an accident or other setback and overcompensates to "prove" that things are normal—until the "second accident" that comes out of supernormalizing.

Glaser and Strauss published a pioneering book, *Awareness of Dying* (1965), which introduced the concept of the "awareness context" to explain how health professionals interact with patients who have terminal diagnoses. The interactions, whether open, closed, suspicious, or of mutual pretense, are driven by whether the patient and family members know whether the diagnosis is terminal. The awareness context is not static; interactions can change over time as the diagnosis leaks out. The research, done at a time when doctors routinely kept patients in the dark about the true nature of their illness, raised knowledge on the topic in the health professions and continues to be a staple of research in nursing, in particular.

Grounded theory was subversive when it was introduced (and still is) because it called for researchers to jump into a situation without being hobbled by the preconceptions of extant literature–the literature review is done later when the reality of the on-the-ground situation is understood. Glaser and Strauss codified the method in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Today, grounded theory is the most cited method in qualitative studies in medical research (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, & Blinkhorn, 2011) and is prominent throughout the social sciences, management, and other fields. Unfortunately, with popularity has come major distortions of the method, as Sbaraini *et al.* explain.

Time out for a disclosure. I studied grounded theory with Glaser for my doctoral work on news-attending and am co-editor of an anthology of essays and articles from contributors in nine countries who have similarly studied with Glaser (Martin and Gynnild, 2011). There are different camps within grounded theory. Strauss and Glaser went in different directions with the method (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a break that included a really interesting smackdown not typically seen in academia. Glaser criticized Strauss and Corbin's well-used text, saying that Strauss's additional techniques were not "grounded theory" and demanding that Strauss drop the term. That did not happen. There are also other splinter groups. The net effect is that many people who say they are doing grounded theory are really just doing interviews and pulling out themes; they aren't creating the kind of working theories, using qualitative and/or quantitative data, that Glaser envisioned.

But it appears grounded theory, or GT, is seeping into newsrooms. Precision journalism guru Phillip Meyer wrote a column about the use of grounded theory in the *Guardian's* "Reading the Riots project." From what I have been able to determine, the Guardian team and researchers from the London School of Economics aren't utilizing grounded theory in the strict Glaserian sense, but analysts did adopt general procedures aimed at finding out what was really going on, instead of being guided by theories about what is happening. This comes as no surprise, as many of GT's protocols would feel familiar to any journalist who has done informal coding and written lots of memos to try to piece together a longform journal-

ism project. While Glaser's student years with Paul Lazarsfeld influenced his creation of the analytical techniques underlying grounded theory, Strauss came out of the Chicago School ethnographic tradition, which was influenced by (and influenced) early 20th century urban reporting.

I won't do much more propagating of grounded theory in this editor's note, as I think there are other overlooked approaches we need to be talking about in the future. I am available to walk prospective contributors through any number of them.

For now, let's celebrate another issue of TJMC. Although you're hearing from me in this space, a number of people have made this possible. The authors are the most obvious, but more than a dozen reviewers gave time before we could publish. We have dedicated copy editors, led by managing editor Margo Wilson, and they miss little. Mitzi Lewis, my co-editor, takes on a number of technical tasks cheerfully; she is a wonderful collaborator.

Jump into the issue and interact with us by leaving comments in the Assessment section or at the end of essays and other articles. This second issue is especially sweet. The first issue was an accomplishment, but this second one, which has even more of what we had hoped for, says TJMC really has something to offer here. Thank you to readers who have returned, and welcome to those who have found us.

Vivian B. Martin is an associate professor and directs the journalism program at Central Connecticut State University.

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