

Recalling childhood memories: An instructional approach using grounded theory

Faye Marsha G. Camahalan
Indiana University Southeast

ABSTRACT

The author applied grounded theory as an instructional approach in a child development course. Seventy-five graduate students recalled their childhood memories. Focus group, class discussion and interview data were collected in 4 stages, identifying 38 initial codes, 23 themes and 12 macrothemes. Findings were validated using participant and literature cross-checks. The participants' childhood memories were used to construct a 5-category model that includes antecedents of childhood memories (i.e. nature of tasks, personal interests, role-taking), description of the phenomena (i.e. microsystems events, changes in routine, moments of solitude), contexts and intervening conditions (i.e. personal characteristics and background, atmosphere and structure of the environment), action/interactional strategies taken (i.e. cognitive, affective), and consequences (i.e. self-growth as an individual, self-growth as part of a group). The author proposes a model of understanding child development through childhood memories. Research findings, limitations, and implications for future studies area discussed.

Keywords: Childhood Memories, Child Development, Grounded Theory

Copyright statement: Authors retain the copyright to the manuscripts published in AABRI journals. Please see the AABRI Copyright Policy at <http://www.aabri.com/copyright.html>.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has memories of his own childhood to some degree, but what individuals remember most are those which created an imprint to our development as an individual. Adler (1937) started the process of interviewing individuals about early childhood memories in order to relate into their outlook on life. Previous studies supported this view, revealing that what individuals remember during childhood years is mostly an explanation of causes and influences in regard to their present adult life (Bird & Reese, 2006, Manaster, G. J., et al., 2001, Mayo, 2001, Fiese, et al., 1995, Manaster & Perryman, 1974). Events that created a significant impact in life tend to be remembered. For example, in his study on retrospective spiritual narratives of adults, Scott (2004) describes that most qualities of the stories collected include the intensity of experience and the high degree of emotionality. Childhood events are remembered because there are some emotional triggers when it happened. In another study by Roisman, Tsai, & Chiang (2004) on the emotional integration of childhood experience, adults talk about early memories consistent with the relevance of childhood events they mention. This implies that the emotional integration of childhood experiences with caregivers plays a significant influence on self-reported stories of childhood experiences. A number of studies also have indicated that childhood memories maybe linked to heightened emotional state and thus associating memory to emotional recall of events (Bandelow, 2004, Pagano, et al., 2004, Monteiro & Haviland, 1985). Several studies on childhood traumatic experiences used memory recall of past experiences as a way to understand clinical cases of abused children (Morse & Robins, 2005, de Beurs, et al, 2005). This implies that what individuals remember in the past helps them understand their own self. Prominent learning theorists (e.g. Ivan Pavlov, 1849-1936; Lev Vygotsky, 1896-1934, Jean Piaget, 1896-1980; B. F. Skinner, 1904-1990; Albert Bandura, b. 1925) unanimously agree that learning occur only when individuals remember previous events and information. Their knowledge is dependent on what they can remember. Thus, one effective way to understand children and their development is to recall their own childhood memories.

The purpose of the study was to apply grounded theory as an instructional approach of understanding child development on the basis of graduate students' stories of childhood memories. There is relatively little research on childhood memories in general; instead most studies pertain to investigations of traumatic experiences. Given the extensive nature of the childhood phenomenon, the researcher wondered how graduate students view their own child development. Also, most of the existing research method on child development has dealt with the positivist approach. The researcher hoped to expand on this research by providing a perspective of child development grounded from the data. By doing this, she can provide a learning approach different from what the students get in the textbooks. Students need to have a personal and firsthand experience in understanding the complex interrelationship of domains and patterns of child development.

The researcher selected grounded theory as an instructional approach methodology because it is contemplative of data collection using the inductive approach. For example, interviews to describe the central phenomenon and to relate it to other influential conditions (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory uses participants' experiences as data to construct and validate the emergent theory or set of theories.

RESEARCH LITERATURE

Glaser (1998) clarified that the use of grounded theory approach is not always to discover a non-existing theory; rather, it is more appropriate if used as a general way of understanding data through the inductive approach of knowing. The following review serves as a take off point for the findings that emerged in the grounded theory analysis.

The Study of Child Development

Murray (2005) in the preface of his book suggested that child development experts are dissatisfied people, “they are not content with existing explanations of how a child grows up, so they search for better interpretations’ (p. xvii). Whoever studies children should be willing to engage in an ever-evolving endeavor. One can never avoid the changing cultural context and complexities of the world of children. To neatly present the study of child development, developmental scientists often discuss separately the domains of development - physical, cognitive, and psychosocial. Though, it is a given fact that these developmental domains are always interconnected throughout life. For instance, when Spencer et al. (2006) surveyed the work of child development expert Esther Thelen (1941-2004), they revealed a trajectory of research pointing to a grand theory of development, explaining that development is a unified process. It is dynamic and characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress.

The contexts of life tell individuals that many elements influence child development and that these factors cannot always be exactly measured. However, authors of child development textbooks are in chorus about how to classify these influences (Santrock, 2007; Papalia, Gross & Feldman, 2005). But the main focus of this study is that development is influenced by the social and historical context. This includes the family, socio-economic status, culture, and history of the place the child grow up. Development is influenced by normative and nonnormative events. Baltes, Reese & Lipsitt (1980) said that influence of time and place are important. The age group, timing of event, historical or cultural time influence a person’s development in a way to understand similarities and differences in development. For example, the critical period has been embedded in many theories of child development, that is, a specific time when the event happens or does not happen, creates a significant impact on the person’s development.

In sum, the realm of the study of child development is always in a continuing quest. It contains within itself its own sources of energy and motivation. Aspects within the system are in motion, shifting and adjusting among them. To understand child development is to study children as living systems. As Ford and Lerner (1992) claimed, “There are variables from multiple, qualitatively distinct level of analysis or levels of organization involved in human life and development. These must operate in organized patterns to produce the coherent unitary functioning of the person-in-context on which both life and development depend. (p.88)” In this study, the researcher hoped to use the grounded theory as an instructional approach to contribute to the continuing quest of investigating themes and patterns in child development.

Childhood Memories as Phenomena for Understanding Child Development

Understanding child development can be impersonal in a way that students search for true knowledge in a very objective way - usually through well-reasoned arguments based on how they observe children and then make connections with what they have read in a book or research

article. But in this study, a personal way of knowing is introduced. Instead of separating oneself from the context of learning, the learners' own childhood memories become the axis of learning. Graduate students' own childhood memories are used as a context for understanding child development.

Childhood experiences illustrate how events in children's life are interconnected. It presents a picture of how early experiences may have impacted adult life. For instance, a study of Renk, et al. (2005) showed that psychopathology in adulthood is associated consistently with report of problematic early experiences; it tried to understand childhood experiences as phenomena by looking at the socio-cultural environment – its atmosphere and structure. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes in his ecological theory of development, other influences – including work and socioeconomic status of parents, societal trends such as changes in family dynamics (size, divorce, and remarriage) – help determine the child's background environment,

One of the goals of this research is for graduate students to realize that the individual's real world is the one he personally experiences. Abraham Maslow (1903-1970), a humanist, contends that the concept of self, a notion of "who I am" provides a path in understanding early childhood throughout the life span (Maslow, 1968). From the humanistic perspective, it is the experiencing person that is in the center of development. Thus, the human experience was considered as the primary phenomenon in the study of humans.

In conclusion, with the goal of understanding child development, the researcher considered introspection of the childhood memories phenomena and careful observation of socio-cultural environment embracing each phenomenon as a venue to provide for better understanding the complexities and interrelatedness of domains and factors influencing child growth.

The Grounded Theory Approach to Knowing

The researcher teaches a graduate course in child development. Graduate students come to class with myriad questions about children and the researcher get enliven by their curiosity about the subject matter. They are driven by inquiry. Thus, she wants them to discover the answers to their queries and be continuously inquiring about the world of children. And to learn about how theories are used to gain in-depth knowledge of child development, she applied the grounded theory method in her teaching.

Grounded theory as an approach to knowing begins with learning through inquiry. Given a situation or phenomenon, the knower seeks to understand what is going on, how the facts interrelate, and why certain events occur. In this way, the knower acts upon his curiosity and interests by analytically thinking his way through controversies or dilemmas; inquiring into preconceptions and what are already known; developing, clarifying and applying theories, and drawing inferences to generate possible answers to his own queries. Therefore, the process of knowing is regarded as dynamic, in fact constant comparison of ideas is in the heart of grounded theory method. It points toward the idea that knowledge may not be fixed and stable but may be emergent, evolving and open to questioning and argument. It also coincides with the kind of knowing and learning that the constructivist philosophy advocates – that is, to understand is to build, create and later assumes ownership of one's own knowledge.

Utilizing the grounded theory method encourages the idea that instructors should teach theories as theories and not as facts. Since theories are explanations of facts, the very essence of learning theories from the "ground" fits into the entire model of my teaching objective for this

study. It sets out to find what theory accounts for the situation or phenomenon. In this respect it is like an action research which aims to understand and discover the theory implicit in the data. Glaser (1998) even implied that it is an emergent type of theory-learning, which further tells students to use theories as they become relevant and avoid the temptation of being easily swayed to the convenience of using theories, thus constraining their own interpretation of the facts. In this manner, even the theories are used as data to be compared, analyzed, critiqued and challenged.

The popularity of grounded theory in adult education and other forms of educational inquiry is increasing, not only because some would like to venture on a different approach, but most importantly because of the learning benefit one gain through the process of grounded theory. For example, Do & Schallert (2004) studies the role of affect in classroom discussion using a qualitative method of inquiry and reported that aside from the students learning the content, they became more aware the many aspects of the topic, and improved their motivation to share their ideas in future discussion. Pratt and Dolbin-MacNab (2003) used participant-observation to use grounded theory and construct a model outlining how students learn qualitative research methods. The instructor in the study said that he witnessed the ability of students to answer their own questions and empower them to participate and learn from peer discussion. The researchers pointed out those students were encouraged to apply concepts and discuss the synergistic interplay among theory, research and practice.

The very nature of grounded theory coincides with the most important goal of this study, that is, to make graduate students benefit from the wonders of inquiry and real-life observations.

METHOD

Participants and Setting of the Study

Seventy-five (75) graduate students from a regional campus of a midwestern university participated in in the study as part of completing a course in child development. Data collection was done over 3 semesters. They were enrolled in the same course taught by the researcher and were pursuing a master's degree in elementary or secondary education.

The course titled "Child Development" is a study of major theories and findings concerning child development. Taught by the researcher, the course aims for graduate students to have an understanding of child development theories through recalling childhood memories. A focus group activity of comparing and contrasting stories of childhood experiences was incorporated as part of the course requirement and classroom activity.

Table 1 (Appendix) shows the four phases and number of participants in each phase. Participants during Phases 1 - 3 were all graduate students enrolled in the course in the first, second and third semester, respectively. Participants in Phase 4 were the same students from Phases 1 - 3 who agreed to have their stories used for constructing a story line about the central phenomenon of study. Also in Phase 4, 11 participants enrolled in the third semester agreed to be interviewed individually. No other demographic data were used in the study.

Procedure

Table 1 shows four stages of data collection. The goal was to move systematically through the following sequence: a. distinguish codes, b. explore themes, c. conceptualize model, and d. examine model for cross checks of existing condition (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005).

The study started with small focus groups and class discussions that enabled the researcher to identify codes, they are as follows: 1. causal conditions, 2. phenomenon, 3. context and conditions, 4. action or interaction strategies, and 5. consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The phenomenon refers to identifying the childhood experience; the causal conditions refer to the contributing factors that is central to childhood experience; the context represents time, location and other specific circumstances; the intervening conditions refer to conditions which act to either help or limit the experience to happen; the action/interactional strategies refers to the interaction of all elements: and the consequences refer to the response to the childhood experience.

Relevant topics were identified through open coding. Twenty-eight graduate students participated in five focus groups ranging in size from 5 to 6 individuals. The focus groups were facilitated to solicit childhood memories and for graduate students to respond to each other's stories. The story collection is on the last part of the course after participants have studied variety of child development concepts, theories and principles. Each participant was asked to choose a childhood experience that s/he believed to have influenced her/his present adult development. Each participant both orally told a story to class and uploaded it to her/his personal homepage provided by the university. Each childhood story subjected to narrative evaluation of structural units to maintain greater reliability in data gathering. Labov's evaluation model (adapted from Wheatley, 1999) summarized in Table 2 (Appendix) was utilized to identify a number of elementary units of narrative structure. The purpose is for consistency of story elements and nothing else.

One class period was allocated for the focus groups where participants listen and reflect on each other's childhood experiences. This activity was followed by a culminating class discussion. The discussion was guided by the four aspects of child development study: 1) heredity, environment and maturation; 2) major contextual influences: family, socioeconomic status, neighborhood, ethnicity; 3) normative and nonnormative influences; and 4) timing of influences such as critical or sensitive periods. Specifically, the focus groups answers the following questions:

1. What was the story about?
2. What brought up this childhood experience to happen?
3. What are intervening conditions which facilitate this childhood experience?
4. What action/interaction strategies facilitate this childhood experience?
5. What are some of the positive or negative consequences of this childhood experience?

These five questions correspond to the major components of the paradigm model described by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Table 3 (Appendix) shows 38 initial codes obtained from the focus groups and class discussion. The codes are a result of students' meaningful discussion to the understanding child development. For example, participants mentioned the role of parents' child rearing practices and family structure in childhood memories. Similar codes developed during the discussion. These codes were used to understand the phenomenon of childhood memories.

Phase 2 consisted of the same data gathering procedure as Phase 1 with the intention to explore codes in depth. Exploring codes through axial coding resulted to themes and patterns to understand child development. The researcher used the same questions in Phase 1 with the addition of follow-up probes.

1. Describe your childhood experience/event.
2. What causes this childhood experience to happen?
Probes: nature of tasks, personal interests, role taking,
3. What are intervening conditions which facilitate this childhood experience?
Probes: personal characteristics and background, atmosphere and structure of the environment
4. What action/interaction strategies facilitate this childhood experience?
Probes: cognitive and affective
5. What are some of the positive or negative consequences of this childhood experience?
Probes: self-growth as an individual, self-growth as part of a group

The researcher identified themes consistent with the focus groups' responses and class discussion. For Phase 3, selective coding was used to relate themes to one another to develop a paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The focus groups for this phase of the study replicate important codes and themes that the researcher identified in previous phases. Relationships of themes were discussed in more detail in a manner that shed light on the understanding of child development. This information lead to the creation of a paradigm model that could be validated in Phase 4. Themes are shown in Table 4 (Appendix). Collectively, the participants and researcher categorized 23 themes that were grouped into 12 macrothemes.

Phase 4 was to re-analyze whether themes and macrothemes in the preliminary paradigm model were plausible. Participants and researcher compare the paradigm model to existing child development theories. Eleven participants from the third semester who agreed to be interviewed were asked to comment on the model by cross checking with their own childhood experience. This procedure aided the finalization of the paradigm model with the hope that it was fully saturated, dependable, and credible (Maxwell, 1996).

Trustworthiness of the Research Process

The issues of validity and reliability are addressed by adhering to the seven criteria outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). As a qualitative study, the researcher presented the logic of data analysis using: criterion 1 - include sample selection, criterion 2 – identify emerging major categories; criterion 3 – distinguish indicators, criterion 4 – explore current condition(s), criterion 5 – formulate relationships, criterion 6 – modify relationships or hypotheses, and criterion 7 - analyze decisions (Criterion 7). Evidences of analytic decisions were shown in Tables 1, 3, 4 and the accompanying narrative within the study.

The procedure of documenting data collection and analysis using phases 1 – 4 establish the logic of the coding procedures. This information about the qualitative method exhibits the trustworthiness of the study (Guba, 1981). For example, conducting re-analysis in Phase 4, conducting theory checks, and cross-checking categories emerging from focus groups, class discussion, and focus groups during different phases are strategies to distinguish, explore, conceptualize and examine the childhood experiences.

RESULTS

The findings are presented in two sections. The first section is on using a grounded theory as an instructional approach. This resulted to creation of a model of understanding child development on the basis of graduate students' stories of recalling their own childhood memories. The second section focuses on three principles of child development that emerged from the focus groups, class discussion, and interviews in Phase 4.

A Model of Understanding Child Development

The model in Figure 1 (Appendix) includes antecedents of childhood memories, the childhood memories as the phenomena, contexts and intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies taken, and consequences.

Antecedents of Childhood Memories

Participants attributed childhood memories to three types of antecedents, including nature of tasks, personal interests and role taking (see Table 4). The nature of tasks, whether they are relevant or reward eliciting was the most important background for the childhood memories. Participants recalled that what they remembered most in their childhood are tasks that they did because they were either important to them or they can get something out of it, for example a reward. Personal interests also prompted them to cherish childhood life events such as those related to their hobbies or sports. A few mentioned that the expectations placed by parents, siblings, teachers, friends, and others influenced them to take and play the roles they now consider part of their childhood memories.

Childhood Memories as the Phenomena

Most research on childhood memories were related to psychotherapy and dealt with the negative aspect of the experience. In contrast, this study solicited a wide variety of positive childhood memories. Almost all participants narrated stories that happened within their microsystems, (i.e. family, school church). Family celebrations, such as birthdays, reunions, visits were the favorite stories. Microsystems events were seen by many as predictable because children live most with their immediate social environment. The social circle is limited to the expected activities and tasks as a child. Bronfenbrenner (1979) pointed out that the child's systems are interrelated and creates a synergistic influence in shaping the child's development. Some shared childhood memories of getting a new toy or new pet. Although this could have been accounted as family events, the class decided that the pivotal theme is the novelty of the event and the impact of change in the routine. A few stories highlighted the moments of solitude during childhood. Participants discussed that they have vivid memories of personal time when they were sick in bed, home alone and playing alone.

Contexts and Intervening Conditions

In using a grounded theory instructional approach, contexts and intervening conditions are not linearly linked to the childhood experiences. They are not simply additive factors that

influence the story. Rather, they are interwoven in every aspect of the story. We observed two major conditions on students' stories: 1. personal characteristics and background, and 2. atmosphere and structure of the environment.

Personal developmental factors deemed to have played a relevant role to each event are mostly developmental tasks under the cognitive and psychosocial stages of development. Specifically, these are learning to read, developing a sense of autonomy and self-control, achieving something, development of self-concept and self-esteem.

The environmental aspects of the stories acted as contextual conditions. The environmental aspects include the location of events, social setting, and the existing socio-cultural values. The fact that most events happened mostly at home, and in school or neighborhood, one story happened in a hospital, these conditions also interacted with the family, peers and other significant others in the social setting existing socio-cultural values at the time of the event.

The stories illustrate that one of the most key influences on children's development come from the atmosphere within the home. The parents described in the stories are loving, supportive parents who enjoy being with their children. A family get-together or celebration stood out as the most mentioned venue of an event. Parents who worked served as models and inspirations to the children. One story was triggered by the fact that both parents work, therefore the child needed to assume the role of caregiver to his younger siblings. This experience is considered to have contributed to the caring and supportive personality of the participant. Participants who grew up with a loving and supportive parents, turned out to value the importance of family in children's development.

None among the participants described extreme poverty or wealth during childhood days. However, the socioeconomic status of the participants implied influence on childhood experiences because of the home location, where to spend recreational activities and what to do during family celebrations and gatherings. Traveling to a different place created the most impact to the participants. Having visited a place that is different from their everyday geographical environment brought out a special memory of family bonding. Examples are visits to a beach, a festival, a relative from another State. It is a combination of the excitement of encountering a novel place and experiencing family closeness that generated a lasting impact on the participant.

The family structure in terms of how things run around the house also played factor in facilitating happy memories during childhood. About 50% of the participants reported that their parents organized house rules for them which helped them become better individuals. Unanimously, they said they did not like it when they were kids. Now that they are adults, they are grateful for their parents' child rearing practices. They have admitted that that time they do not know any better about learning to value discipline.

Similar observation was reported about classroom structure and how teachers designed instruction to promote school achievement. Some participants explicitly mentioned that school grades and awards served as motivating factors for them to do well in their studies. Some hinted that they still remember some school-related childhood memories where they have spent long hours of studying or working on a project to get high grades.

Action/interaction Strategies Taken

Stories of childhood memories illustrate two major types of coping strategies, namely: cognitive and affective. Cognitive strategies refer to planning and practicing for the identified

goals and allocating appropriate time and effort to achieve each goal. Most respondents indicated that parental support and encouragement, as well as prior experience influenced them to achieve positive results. For example, one participant said that he had to practice baseball all weekend with his father. Participants also recalled that they have to engage in a great deal of affective strategies to help maintain a positive attitude. Self-talk was a popular strategy. Respondents shared that most of them seek or ask for help from adults. They have a notion that adults know better. The availability of adult support was a huge factor to encourage help seeking. About 80% of the participants said that they have supportive parents, older siblings and teachers available to them.

Consequences of Childhood Memories

All respondents reported a unifying theme about self-growth regarding the consequences of their childhood memories. Everyone believed that their childhood memories taught lessons about themselves as individuals and as part of different social groups. Many valued the “moment” they realized self-worth and sense of belongingness. Participants felt loved by their family, teachers and friends. These self-reports are consistent with Maslow’s (1968) contention that children are individuals who want to be loved and be valued as part of the group. It is also a time to nurture the children’s sense of self to prepare them for life. Most admitted that they have experienced self-growth. All narrated childhood experiences illustrate a theme of emotional growth. Participants recalled the events when they experienced frustrations and also triumphs. Whether a negative or positive experience, it created an imprint on the selfhood that is believed to have a carryover effect up to adult life. It is important to mention though that the negative experiences created a positive effect because of the availability of a support system, usually a family or a group of friends. In one story, a caring teacher gave the child the encouragement to continue playing sports even after losing an important game.

Summary of the Model

Respondents gave a convincing representation of childhood memories. Childhood memories are ubiquitous. Individuals cherish their childhood memories because of the life lessons they have learned from them. Recalling childhood memories depends on many interrelated factors. All participants used cognitive and affective action strategies to facilitate childhood experiences as efficient as possible. Chief among these strategies are combination of protective self-talk or self-motivation and help seeking strategies. Most, if not all, reported childhood memories lead to the positive consequence of self growth.

Principles of Understanding Child Development through Childhood Memories

The researcher and the participants identified 3 emergent principles of understanding child development through childhood memories. Most respondents described these principles simultaneously during focus groups and discussion. The researcher organized and worded them to meet the theoretical justification. Therefore, these principles were grounded from the data collected in this study.

Preserve the Integrity of Developmental Life Course

To understand child development, as in any period of human development, is to understand the meaning of life. A child's life course is a developmental account of a cumulative process. Timing of event could be the emphasis of studying child development. Experiences emerge in the moment, but there is a long term effect that sets the stage for future life experiences (Spencer et al., 2006). The childhood memories illustrate how to trace the continuity of childhood over time. Discussing child development in fragments is like trying to decipher a puzzle with missing pieces, or worse, presenting knowledge in half-truth. Frankl (1992) in his discussion of man's search for meaning said, "people tend to see only the stubble fields of transitoriness but overlook and forget the full granaries of the past into which they have brought the harvest of their lives: the deeds done, the loves loved, and last but not the least, the sufferings they have gone through with courage and dignity" (p. 151). In this study, graduate students understood child development in a holistic manner, created patterns and themes to give meaning to their own childhood experiences.

Study Children in Context

A child's development is a gradual result from the interrelation of variety of elements and systems. The interaction is nonlinear yet synchronized in a manner that allows the child to develop. There is natural foundation in the environmental circumstances that provide for exploration and selection. The present context, or the *place*, refers to the child's combined geographical location and social atmosphere at a given point in his life course. It is important to consider this matter to understand child development. As what Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted, the ecology of the child's system interact and creates a synergistic effect on his development. Just as we need to understand the ecology of many other living things (e.g. fish and ocean, tree and forest, etc.), we also need to understand the ecology of society if we wish to understand how children develop. During the focus group, one student said, "If one applied a cookie cutter way of studying children, then he has just failed to understand the diverse phenomena underlying child development." In looking at childhood memories, my class well understood that we are studying not merely the outcomes of development, but the varying shapers of it.

Respect the Phenomenal Self

The two macro-principles mentioned above extend over many facets of development. Following this pattern, the new respect for individuality also deserves a look at the phenomenal self of a child's development. In the focus groups and class discussion, as participants narrated their child memories, I have witnessed the most important factor in understanding child development, that is, the human factor. Respondents described and identified life's happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, etc. Everyone agreed that we are studying the *human* in human development. In my own modern version of existential analysis, I found the grounded theory approach of understanding child development as a way to fulfill the mission of promoting self growth to my students. When Maslow admitted that "We (humans) just don't know enough about growth yet to be able to define it well." (1968, p. 24), I took it to heart and developed a teaching goal related to it. If every person realizes the value of inherent potential to develop and grow, then learning will come easy. After our grounded theory activity for

childhood memories, all participants collectively appreciated the distinct human quality of self development, as well as the capacity of the person to have a synergistic effect on others.

The three principles can be summarized in three words: time, place, human. To understand child development is to give meaning to the *time* and *place* of a *human* child in the world.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to use grounded theory as an instructional approach to understand child development on the basis of graduate students' stories of childhood memories. The findings are based on verbal reports of adults' childhood memories. The key characteristic of this qualitative study is that it focuses on participants' perspectives. Generalizing to a broader population is not the intention of this study. The created model could be tested in future research, rather than test an existing theory.

The findings offer three principles in understanding child development through childhood memories. The grounded theory approach utilized in this study doesn't suggest any kind of finality. On the contrary, it implies a dynamic and ever flowing perspective on child development. It suggests that the puzzle's pieces continually shift positions to form new relationships, themes, macrothemes, patterns, resulting in a kaleidoscope of changing images of the developing child. When one piece changes, the entire picture also transforms in small or large ways. Therefore each pattern at any given time can be summarized in the form of models or paradigms. Just like Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, each component results from a combination of direct experiences, opinions and general learning culture. It is my contention that every teacher and class has its own unique learning culture. The rapport I have established with my participants definitely contributed to the lively discussion and rich data collection. The openness during focus groups was honed through previous class activities of similar nature. The participant's ability to articulate grounded theory analysis was manifested most probably because the teacher prepared the class to a prerequisite solid foundation on the basics of child development. It is worth noting that learning activities which call for the use of higher-thinking skills require some prior skills and knowledge of the subject matter. Graduate students need to be equipped with theories so that they can interpret the facts in the real world.

The grounded theory approach of knowing and learning proved to be effective in this study. Participants were able to derive meaning from data, more importantly, the data are about themselves. Since social science is about human beings and what they do every day, the classroom can be considered a microcosm of a social space. Instructors usually teach child development as a highly abstract and impersonal social science course, with relatively little grounding in the actual experiences of the learners. The students are reduced to passive observers, note-takers and listeners. They study the child's world as if they are outside this very world. The distancing of instruction from the personal experiences or the "objectification" deprives a great amount of learning. This is how the Zen painter and tea master Takuan Soho (1573-1645) puts it in his own words, "One may explain water, but the mouth will not become wet. One may expound fully the nature of fire, but the mouth will not become hot. Without touching real water and real fire, one will not know these things." The inductive approach to learning and teaching is not new, neither the experiential learning. It is actually through inductive and experiential method a child starts learning about his world. When the childhood memories were brought up, students were reluctant to disclose their personal experiences at first. Some

seemed to be cynical of the whole learning process. When the researcher started sharing her own childhood memories and modeling grounded theory approach to interpret them, she felt that she brought reality back to them.

The researcher identifies the following limitations of the study. The data collected are comprised of stories and perspectives of graduate students. It is possible that they provided erroneous statements, or that they reported stories that are not their own. Also, the model in Figure 1 is intended not to suggest a causal relationship but to expose relationships among various elements of childhood memories.

The findings warrant future work on using grounded theory as an instructional approach. The researcher proposes that future studies can be done on which measures of themes and macrothemes of understanding child development through childhood memories are correlated among each other. Another approach is to compare and contrast such specific themes to other childhood experiences. Future researchers can also explore how the model would relate to different groups of students in a different learning structure and atmosphere.

REFERENCES

- Adler, A. (1937). Significance of early recollections. *International Journal of Individual Psychology*, 3, 211-227.
- Baltes, P. B., Reese, H. W., & Lipsitt, L. (1980). Life-span developmental psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 31, 65-110.
- Bandelow, B., Torrente, A. C., Wedekind, D., Broocks, A., Hajok, G., Ruther, E. (2004). Early traumatic life events, parental rearing styles, family history of mental disorders, and birth risk factors in patients with social anxiety disorder. *European Archives of Psychiatry & Clinical Neuroscience*, 254, 6, 397-406.
- Bird, A. & Reese, E. (1996). Emotional reminiscing and the development of an autobiographical self. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 4, 613-626.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. CA: Sage.
- de Beurs, E., Cornijs, H., Twisk, J. W. R., Sonnenberg, C., Beekman, A. T. F., Deeg, D. (2005). Stability and change of emotional functioning in latea life: modeling of vulnerability profiles. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 84, 1, 53-63.
- Do, S. L. & Schallert, D. L. (2004). Emotions and classroom talk: Toward a model of the role of affect in students' experiences of classroom discussions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96, 4, 619-634.
- Fiese, B. H., Hooker, K. A., Kotary, L., Schawgler, J., Rimmer, M., (1995). Family stories in the early stages of parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 763-770.
- Ford, D. H., & Lerner, R. M. (1992). *Developmental systems theory*. CA: Sage.
- Frankl, V. E. (1992). *Man's search for meaning*, 4th ed. MA: Beacon Press.
- Glaser, B (1998). *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions*. CA: Sociology Press
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology*, 2, 75-91.
- Harry, B., Sturges, K. M., & Klingner, J. K. (2005). Mapping the process: An exemplar of process and challenge in grounded theory analysis. *Educational Researcher*, 34, 3-13.

- Manaster, G. J., Berra, S., & Mays, M. (2001). Manaster-Perryman early recollections scoring manual: Findings and summary. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 57, 413-419.
- Manaster, G. J., & Perryman, T. B. (1974). Early recollections and occupational choice. *Individual Psychology: A Journal of Adlerian Theory and Practice*, 30, 232-237.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. CA: Sage.
- Mayo, J. A. (2001). Life analysis: Using life-story narratives in teaching life-span developmental psychology. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 14, 1, 25-41.
- Monteiro, K. P. & Haviland, J. M. (1985, August). *Emotional mood states and the recall of childhood memories*. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED262310)
- Morse, J. Q. & Robins, C. J. (2005). Personality-life event congruence effects in late-life depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 84, 1, 25-32.
- Pagano, M. E., Skodol, A. E., Stout, R. L., Shea, M. T., Yes, S., Grilo, C. M., Sanislow, C. A., Bender, D. S., McGlashan, T. H., Zanarini, M. C., Gunderson, J. G. (2004). Stressful life events as predictors of functioning: findings from the Collaborative Longitudinal Personality Disorders Study. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 110, 6, 421-430.
- Papalia, D. E., Olds, S. W., Feldman, R. D. (2005). *A Child's world: Infancy through adolescence, 10th ed.* NY: McGraw Hill.
- Pratt, D.R., & Dolbin-MacNab, M.L. (2003). Marriage and family therapy students learning qualitative research: Frameworks identified through participatory-observation. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(3), 333-352.
- Renk, K., Roberts, R., Klein, J., Rojas-Vilches, A., & Sieger, K. (2005). Retrospective reports of college students' childhood problems. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61, 235-250.
- Santrock, J. W. (2007). *Child Development, 11th ed.* MA: McGraw Hill
- Spencer, J. P., Clearfield, M., Corbetta, D., Ulrich, B., Buchanan, P., & Schoner, G. (2006). Moving toward a grand theory of development: In Memory of Esther Thelen. *Child Development*, 77, 6, 1621-1538.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview, In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273 – 286). CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. CA: Sage.
- Thomas, M. R. (2005). *Comparing theories of child development, 6h ed.* CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Wheatley, J. (1999). *A Discourse analysis of east enders*. Retrieved from <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/french/as-sa/ASSA-6-7/JW6.html>, on 9 April 2004.

APPENDIX

Table 1
Four Phases in Data Collection

Phase	Coding	Semester	Purpose	Participants (n)
1	Open	first	Distinguish codes to start data analysis.	28
2	Axial	second	Explore codes to construct themes.	27
3	Selective	third	Conceptualize a paradigm model by discussing themes in relation to model	20
4	Selective	first second third	Examine model until saturated by testing, validating and explaining how it relates to emergent principles of child development.	individual childhood experiences, 11 individual interviews

Table 2
Labov’s Evaluation Model for Story Narratives

Structure	Guide Question
Abstract	What was this about?
Orientation	Who? What? When? Where?
Complication	Then what happened?
Evaluation	So what?
Result	What finally happened?

Table 3
Initial Categories and Codes in Phase 1

Category	Code
Antecedents of childhood memories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. hobby 2. importance of task at hand 3. parent expectation 4. teacher expectation 5. availability of resources 6. availability of reward
Phenomena: Childhood memories (What are they about?)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. birthday party 8. family vacation 9. sports competition 10. school activity 11. play time with family and friends 12. family visits 13. family social gathering 14. church activity 15. moving to another place 16. new toy 17. new pet
Context and intervening conditions that affect childhood memories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. belief that “I am <i>just</i> a child’ 19. previous childhood experiences 20. school grade 21. family support 22. teacher support 23. friends support
Action/Interaction Strategies Taken	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 24. encourage self or talk to self 25. think of a plan or strategy 26. practice 27. face the challenge 28. aspire to achieve the price/reward 29. avoid humiliation 30. prove self-worth 31. ask/seek for help
Consequences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 32. improved self-concept 33. increased confidence 34. sense of achievement 35. felt valued or loved 36. achieved happiness

- 37. appreciated family
- 38. appreciated other individuals

Table 4
Macrothemes and Themes in Phase 3

Category	Macrotheme	Theme
Antecedents of childhood memories	1. nature of tasks	1. task-relevance
	2. personal interests	2. task-characteristic
	3. role-taking	3. hobbies
Phenomena: Childhood memories (What are they about?)	4. microsystem events	4. expectations placed by others
	5. change in routine	5. family events
	6. moments of solitude	6. school events
		7. religious events
Context and intervening conditions that affect childhood memories		8. new things in life
	7. personal characteristics and background	9. personal time and space
	8. atmosphere and structure of the environment	10. self-concept
	9. cognitive	11. previous childhood experiences
Action/Interaction Strategies Taken	10. affective	12. school grade
		13. family support
		14. social support
Consequences		15. planning
		16. practicing
		17. self-talk
		18. self-motivation
		19. help seeking
	11. self-growth as in individual	20. improved self-concept
	12. self-growth as part of a group	21. improved self-esteem
		22. improved self worth
		23. sense of belongingness to a group

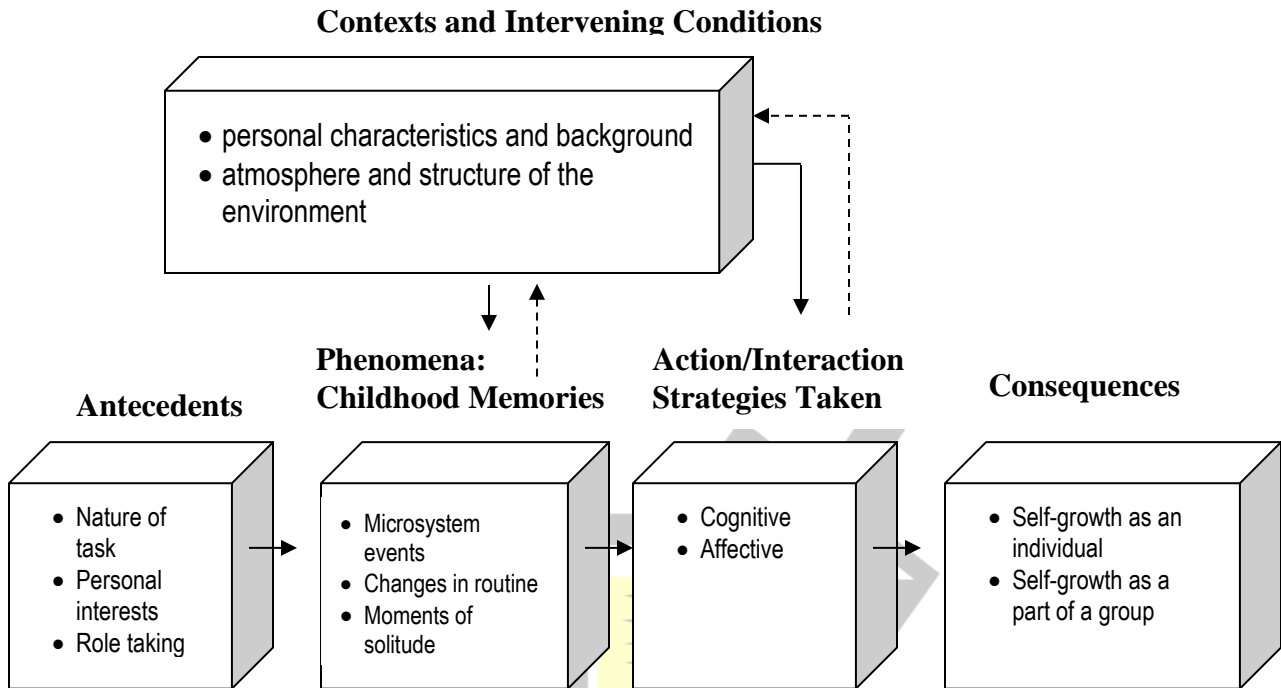


Figure 1. A Model of understanding child development on the basis of stories from childhood memories.