



## **BECOMING SELFLESS FOR OTHERS: A GROUNDED THEORY OF COMMITMENT TO SERVICE**

*Roland Nino L. Agoncillo*  
*San Pablo Colleges & De La Salle University (Part-Time)*  
*Roberto T. Borromeo*  
*De La Salle University*

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper evolved a grounded theory on being an *Educational Partner* particularly on seed of the shared mission in an educational institution. Fifty participants representing different stakeholders were interviewed over a period of almost 2 years. Interviews were analyzed using the constant comparison method. "Becoming Selfless for Others" was the core category that emerged. As a process, "Becoming Selfless for Others" consisted of five stages: Discovery of the nature of being a partner, Identifying the impetus, Contextualizing the process, Manifesting or acting out being an educational partner, and Unveiling the outcomes/consequences of being an educational partner. These processes can serve as a grounded typology or construct to enable stakeholders to gain a better hold of how they live, grasp, and deal with their "commitment to service" and what it means to "become selfless for others". Based on the findings, educational stakeholders can be classified as kernel seeds, hard-coated seeds and moisture-soaked seeds based on their actual lived experiences in being educational partners. The theory posits that "becoming selfless for others" goes beyond the stakeholders' profession and work. Likewise, the theory speculates that certain predisposing factors such as self-identity, passion and commitment of the stakeholders could have an influence in the multi-distinct processes of "becoming selfless".

### **INTRODUCTION**

The mission to educate the young especially the poor which is pioneered and preserved for a long time entirely by generations of religious organizations particularly of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, has now been enlarged and enriched by the gifts brought by others: "educational partners", who have already become associated with this mission and wish to share it. (Johnston, 1997).

The General Council of the Institute of the Brothers in 1967 referred to this mission as a "shared mission" in which many others, in various ways, choose to participate.

"Being an Educational Partner" refers to the important role of lay people in the shared mission which according to the General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1997 is the change of mentality that allows people belonging to lasallian educational institutions to consider their work as something which is proper to them and not something for which the Brothers alone are responsible. This new thinking therefore as accorded to by the Second Vatican Council, recognizes the indispensable role of lay people in the "ministry" of Christian education.

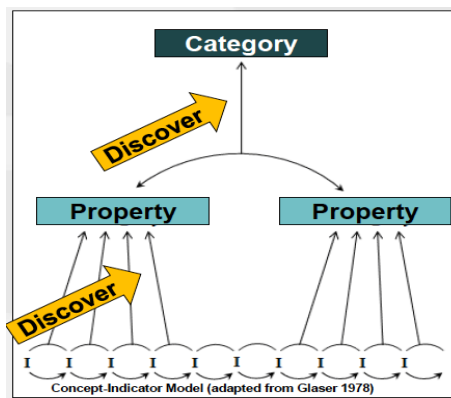
In an earlier study, Quejada II (2002) as cited by Laguda (2007), pointed out that while many stakeholder partners were aware that their Mission was in the arena of education, the majority had difficulty articulating and expressing their commitment to service with a shared mission in terms of a clear and coherent conceptual framework of "what being an educational partner ought to be. This study provides a phenomenological approach to an understanding of "Being an Educational Partner" in the Philippines and across the globe from the perspective of its stakeholders in addition to helping those in other educational settings and institutions understand their own levels of commitment.

This qualitative study anchored on Glaser's (1967, 1978) grounded theory, takes into consideration the context of the Educational Partner in their varying levels of experience in the in different lasallian institutions in the world sharing in the mission. The grounded theory approach appears to hold considerable potential for the study. Given its focus on the generation of theory from data collected in the field, it seems ideally suited for understanding "Educational Partners", a by-word that is characterized by its lack of a well-developed theoretical foundation and a strong commitment to the world of practice. Thus, inspite of the various documents written and the grandiloquence that goes along being associated with Lasallian Educational Institutions, there is a great need to convey at least in theory what it means to be "educational partners" in the Lasallian Mission.

## METHODOLOGY

This study focused on determining how stakeholders in educational institutions knew and understood their varying levels of organizational commitment in terms of their Shared Mission. The Grounded Theory of Barney Glaser (1978), together with that of Strauss and Corbin (1998), was used to generate data that is vital, relevant, and yields high-impact concerns (Glaser, 1992). The interpretive or inductive way of knowing was adapted in the process of emergence by being faithful to the concept-indicator model of Glaser (1978) as stated below:

**Figure 1. Concept-Indicator Model**



This model provides the essential link between data and concept based on the constant comparing of (1) indicator to indicator, and then when a conceptual code is generated (2) also comparing incidents to the emerging concept. (Glaser, 1978).

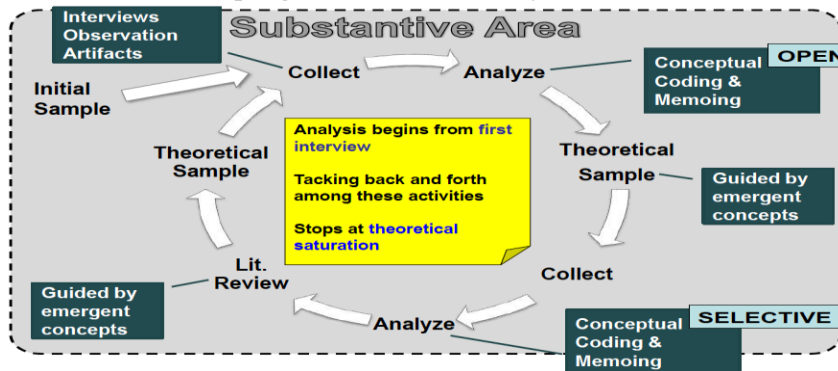
Like a "pendulum" that swings back and forth from one indicator to another the data was compared and analyzed that led to discoveries of themes or categories and their dimensions. According to Glaser (1978), the analyst is forced into confronting similarities, differences, and degrees of consistency of meaning between indicators from the comparisons of indicator to indicator which generates an underlying uniformity and in turn results in a coded category and the beginning of properties of it. He further states that from comparisons of further indicators to the conceptual codes, the code is sharpened to achieve its "best fit" while further properties are generated until the code is verified and saturated.

These categories were "theoretically coded" by writing the particular relationships that exists between them through their properties/dimensions. Theoretical codes conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypothesis to be integrated into a theory (Glaser, 1978).

Data collection were done through "snowball" sampling that is purposive through in-depth interviews that are semi-structured and participant driven. Interviews conducted were accompanied with

distanced or participative observations along with journal artifacts and documents. These combined data collection method was conducted in order to close gaps between and among them. (Rader, 2007).

**Figure 3. Snowball Data Sampling, Collection and Analysis Procedural Framework**



At successive stages in this study, themes moved from a low level of abstraction toward becoming major and overarching themes rooted in the concrete evidence provided by the data. These overarching themes served as the foundational pillars of theoretical saturation. The researcher then was able to achieve “theoretical saturation” when the additional data for such themes failed to uncover any new ideas about the developing theory (Bowen, 2006).

### First Stage: Open Coding by Running the Data Open

“Running the data open” is coding the data in every way possible (Glaser, 1978). The researcher extensively coded the data for as many categories that might fit under this stage. From the data interview notes that the researcher gathered, statements like: "being an educational partner is a work of association" and "it is a mark of someone who works together", different incidences and concepts were written into as many categories possible like "collaboration with other partners", belonging to a network", and "extended linkages to school, community and people", allowing the best fits, the most workable ones and the core relevancies to emerge on their own statements.

Beginning with line-by-line open coding of data and comparing incidents to each other in the data, the researcher coded the data in every way possible by asking a set of questions of the data: ‘What is this data a study of?’ ‘What category does this incident indicate?’, ‘What is actually happening in the data?’, ‘What is the main concern being faced by the participants?’, and ‘What accounts for the continual resolving of this concern?’ These questions, sustain the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity, transcend descriptive details, and encourage a focus on patterns among incidents that yield codes. It is through intermittent line-by-line coding that forces the researcher to verify and saturate categories, minimizes missing an important category, and ensures relevance by generating codes with emergent fit to the substantive area under study. This ensures relevance of the emerging theory by enabling the researcher to see which direction to take in theoretical sampling before becoming too selective and focused on a particular problem. Hence, the result is a rich, dense theory with the feeling that nothing has been left out (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

Open coding was then the initial level of abstraction and conceptualization of the researcher, the line by line approach of constantly stimulating ideas goes hand in hand with the “memoing” of the idea. Initial memos were written based on the data, i.e. when such data speaks of concepts like "collaboration", "network" and "linkages"; the memo written on being an educational partner is about "having a sense of togetherness with one another in the hope of addressing the needs of others". The process runs parallel with the coding and analysis process to capture the researcher’s emergent ideation of substantive and theoretical codes and categories. Thus, theory articulation is facilitated through extensive and systematic process of memoing that parallels the data analysis in grounded theory (Glaser & Holton, 2004).



Memos, as described by Glaser (1978) himself, are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst by coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), memos and diagrams are essential procedures in research aimed at theory building because they enable the researchers to keep a record of the analytic process. In this study, the researcher wrote memos that serve as theoretical notes about the data and the conceptual connections between categories. Memo writing helped the researcher to raise the data to a conceptual level and develop the properties of each category. Later on, memos were further coded to validate emerged concepts and categories at the first open coding, and analysis. Here is where the tedious analytical engagement of the researcher happens because as the process goes on further, memos that are developed early on, later, generates new memos and so on and so forth.

At this point, the researcher made further abstractions, scrutinizing the relationship between categories and their properties, moving back and forth between outlines and ideas as he sorts forcing underlying patterns, integrations and multivariate relations between the concepts toward a production of higher-level concepts in a systematic and organized way. By this time, the researcher has already a "gut" sense of what the research-storyline is all about.

### **Second Stage: Selective Coding by Delimiting Categories and Properties**

Selective coding begins only after the researcher has identified a potential core variable. Here, subsequent data collection and coding is delimited to that which is relevant to the emerging conceptual framework (the core and those categories that relate to the core). According to Holton (2010), this process of delimiting occurs at two levels: first, as the theory integrates, it solidifies with fewer modifications needed as the researcher compares the next incidents of a category to its properties/dimensions, i.e. "discovering the nature of an educational partner" emerged as one of the core variables from which other categories like "network with other partners" and "assuming roles in the shared mission" relate. Later modifications were mainly about clarifying the logic of the theory and integrating elaborating details of properties into the major outline of interrelated categories. As the researcher begins to discover an underlying uniformity in the categories and properties, the theory is reformulated with a smaller set of higher-level concepts. This second level of delimiting the theory reduces the original list of categories for coding. As the theory develops, becomes reduced, and increasingly works better in ordering a mass of data, the researcher becomes committed to it with focus and selectivity (Glaser & Holton 2004).

As a result of the selective coding process, the researcher was able to delimit categories by developing "theory bits" that fit, work and is relative. According to Glaser (2010), theory bits are bits of theory from a substantive theory that a person used in a sentence or so, whether as a colleague, teacher, consultant or student; it can be any concept or hypothesis from the theory (e.g. leading people toward God, making a difference in the lives of others, etc.). By the use of multivariate thinking, the researcher was able to continue these theory bits to fuller explanations. This is the great benefit of trusting a theory that fits, works, and is relevant as it is continually modified.

### **Third Stage: Theoretical Coding by Weaving the Fractured Story**

Theoretical codes conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypothesis to be integrated into a theory (Glaser, 1978). It is through the use of theoretical codes that give integrative scope, broad pictures and a new perspective that the researcher was able to maintain his conceptual level in writing about the concepts and their interrelations. Conceptual elaboration to achieve an integrated theoretical framework therefore concludes when the relationships among individually elaborated concepts emerge through the identification and appropriate use of such theoretical codes.

In grounded theory, theoretical codes are not selected and imposed on the data as a preconceived theoretical framework. Instead, through theoretical sorting of memos, the researcher was able to theoretically discriminate as to where each memoed idea fits in the emerging theory. In addition with sorting, data and ideas are theoretically ordered and thus provide theoretical completeness. The researcher soon sees where each concept fits and works within the theory, its relevance, and how it will carry forward



in the cumulative development of the theory (Holton, 2010). It is in this stage that the core category is determined. From the "discovery of the nature of being a partner", the next stage of the process led to an "identifying the impetus it has", further "contextualizing the process", 'manifesting or acting out being an educational partner, and ably "unveiling the outcomes/consequences of being an educational partner from which the theory of "Becoming Selfless for Others" emerged. The properties and dimensions of the core category were more fully developed at this time and the threads of the properties and dimensions of related phenomena, categories, and concepts were interlaced and woven tightly together. Truly, "Becoming selfless for others" emerged as the "core variable/category" that appears to account for most of the variation around the concern or problem in this study.

#### **Fourth Stage: Writing the Theory**

The final stage of grounded theory methodology is actually attempting to explain in writing how the core categories have been developed in elaborating the story line and generating the theory. According to Glaser (2009), writing is a "write-up" of piles of ideas from theoretical sorting. Here, the researcher utilized the attitude of being "adumbrate" by carefully weaving the theory into its place in the literature (Glaser, 2009). This process of adumbration to writing in classical grounded theory is the aspect of reworking drafts to integrate the generated theory into the existing literature. Thus, to explain more fervently the emerging theory, the researcher utilized the use of extant literature.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The researcher used a "metaphor" in order to describe more vividly what his mind grasps relative to the scenario and it helped him understand, perhaps not all but some of, what it must be like (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), researchers can use metaphors to help them understand and explain events.

In this study the main story seemed to be about:

*How stakeholders in De La Salle Schools understand and manage the seed of shared mission in being educational partners, that is, how they go through a process of commitment to service in becoming selfless for others as seed-persons of the founder being rooted in St. John Baptist De La Salle, and gaining a sense of communion together by association in the lasallian organization. On becoming selfless for others, stakeholders enter into a five multi-distinct yet related dimensional process namely: discovering the nature of being an educational partner, determining the causal condition of being an educational partner, contextualizing the process of being an educational partner, manifesting the action/strategies of being an educational partner, and unveiling the expected outcome or consequence of being an educational partner.*

*There are three types of stakeholders in terms of what they have discerned concerning their commitment to service to the shared mission in being a lasallian partners and becoming selfless for others: the kernel seeds, hard-coated seeds, and moisture-soaked-seeds... the kernel seeds are those who are fresh on the site in the lasallian organization, they need to be configured, oriented and guided. They are not yet aware of what needs to be done and have to internalize still the values of the organization. They have the liberty to grow in the organization as a single seed, an individual enjoying one's personal beliefs and attitudes, yet also have the freedom to let this self-definition die and be sowed accordingly under the organizations' vision and mission. They become very much willing to share and partake in the shared mission but have certain personal reservation with shallow personal conviction with regard to their commitment to serve others and the institution. They have been attracted and inspired to do the shared mission, yet fall short to concretize their ideals in response to what has to be done. They either fall prey to the voluptuous birds of the organization; persons who feast on their own personal gain, or fall on the rocky thorn ground of the organization where one becomes futile and effortless in doing the shared mission.*

*On the other hand, the hard-coated seeds are the ones that can be pricked, chipped, nicked or*



*fired. They usually take time to realize their shared mission and identity as lasallians. They hesitate at first to be part of the many concrete ways to respond as partners to the mission. They are not that receptive yet to change and progress as compared to kernel and moisture-soaked seeds. They know the demands of tradition and of the organization yet remain blind to give up one's self and become an agent of transformation. They have to be softened through various exposure formation and integration in order to assimilate the life of the founder and the core values of the institution. Once fired-up, pricked, chipped or nicked from their selfishness through progressive formation, they eventually ignite the spark of other stakeholders to go out of their shell and be one together in fulfilling the mission.*

*Lastly, the moisture-soaked seeds are the ones that stir up the spirit of shared mission. They germinate faster in terms of living up the sense of service and commitment in their shared mission. They stand on better soil for they have a very good understanding of what needs to be done and how to respond to what must be done. They serve as role-models and mentors that guide other stakeholders to take that leap of faith and sprout out from their usual self to a journey of personal and spiritual conviction for the welfare of others as manifested in their actions. They become living examples of being associated with the mission and a lasting influence on how to be committed to work together as a team for a common end and purpose.*

There is no qualitative or quantitative difference among the three types of stakeholders. The three types of stakeholders are basic descriptions or points of view that may predominate in the different processes of becoming selfless on being a lasallian partner. Yet, it is also quite good to take note of the possibility that more than one type may prevail or co-exist in the different processes of becoming selfless for others.

The storyline served as a guide for the researcher to be able to step back and weave the story into a higher level of abstraction and saturation through interchangeability of incidents and transferability of the theory to other areas by integrating structure and process at the same time.

"Becoming Selfless for Others: A Commitment to Service" is the Theory that emerged from five (5) multi-distinct yet related main processes of categories: 1) *discovering the nature of being an educational partner*; 2) *determining the causal condition of being an educational partner*; 3) *contextualizing the process of being an educational partner*; 4) *manifesting the action/strategies of being an educational partner*; 5) *unveiling the expected outcome/consequence of being an educational partner*.

*Discovering the nature of being an educational partner*, which comes as the first process of action that stakeholders take in explaining the theory of becoming selfless, comprises several other processes. It involves the imperative process of being *rooted in the founder*. Being "rooted" speaks of the essence of being an educational partner (*vision-mission directed and founded, has vocation to serve and sense of stewardship, belonging to a network of lasallians, assuming role in the shared mission, and undaunted service to the marginalized*) through the stakeholders' *sensitivity* to the life and works of the founder, John Baptist De La Salle. Such process of sensitivity required the processes of *recognizing, understanding and realizing*.

*Recognizing* meant for the stakeholders a process of figuring out what an educational partner is. Stakeholders begin to discover what it means for them to share in the lasallian mission of being lasallian partners. *Understanding*, on the other hand, required stakeholders to comprehend more deeply the life and mission of the founder relative to their own work and lives. The *realizing* category nevertheless, involves certain dynamic elements where the stakeholders begin to be more exact and steady in sensitizing their being educational partners through their own *passion to teach and serve* and having their own *personal conviction* where they describe on a personal level their *identified character of being an educational partner*. Such passion and conviction connotes key intervening components though: *faith-compelling and formative encounter* that are necessary in the process of recognizing the shared mission, understanding the shared mission and realizing the shared mission.



These processes that stakeholders undergo triggers the *causal condition of being an educational partner* which is further contextualized through the *extended linkages of partners (school, community, people); dedicated-excellence in all sectors (Brothers, faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents); and encompassing connectedness to the educational institution.*

*The context of being an educational partner* is manifested through the *actions/strategies of being a stakeholder partner* where they manifest *collaboration with other partners, collegial-action among partners, unity of purpose, moral and ethical standards, taking part in different school and socio-activities, self-giving sacrifice of time and talent, progressive formation for professional and spiritual development, leading people towards God, and salvific-orientation.*

While the stakeholders manifest their role as educational partners through such actions and strategies, what is evident is the inherent manifestations of *participating in the shared mission, living by example, and making a difference in the lives of others.*

As stakeholders continue to express themselves, the *expected outcome or consequence* of their actions lead them to a *socio-responsive perspective for the common good, a sense of priority for education, education beyond borders, and excellent quality of standards.* Making them in the process, *associated living witnesses* who are *value-driven individuals* that are *spiritually grounded agents of transformation.*

At this point of the process of doing grounded theory, the researcher had already developed a higher level of theoretical sensitivity, analysis, and synthesis, to a wide range of integrating codes as used across a wide range of disciplines enhancing the researcher's ability to see their emergent fit to the developing theory of Becoming Selfless for Others. Here, the researcher becomes more in-tune to the meanings embedded in the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). As Morrison (1994) describes:

During this phase the researcher is able to create a generalized story and determine points of departure and of variation in the story. The process of analysis begins with line-by-line analysis to identify first level codes. Second-level codes are used to identify significant portions of the text and compile these excerpts into categories (Morrison, 1994; p39).

By this time the researcher is far more sensitive to what the data are saying as he becomes immersed and exposed to the data through analysis. Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasized that the significance of what is being said comes through when one is immersed in the materials for some time. For them, it is like peeling an onion where every layer that is removed takes you that much closer to the core.

All the other categories under this stage were interwoven to create the tapestry and significance of the core of their "Commitment to Service in Becoming Selfless for Others."

## CONCLUSION

"Becoming Selfless for Others", which emerged from the data, represents the core category or basic social process by which stakeholders attempt to understand and articulate their "Commitment to Service" in being educational partners today as they enter into the process of becoming selfless for others. For the stakeholder partners in this study, and based on the researcher's observation and analysis; the meaning of becoming selfless for others in terms of their commitment to service was concretize when they become educational partners and decided to partake in the educational mission as a whole. Having made that choice, a process of transformation from being self-centered individuals to becoming selfless value-driven individuals begin with the person's entry and integral development in the organization and educational institution. In general, and in its entirety, the theory manifests a process of "being and becoming" that provides opportunities for one's personal growth, professional development and spiritual unfolding.



In one of the articles written by Glaser (2010) entitled "Organizational Careers: A Forward Theory", he pointed out that since so much of what we all do is linked with organizations, it is therefore very important to consider an organizational career as a special entity and develop our understanding of it. Having been faithful to the central tenets of grounded theory methodology, Becoming Selfless for Others was actually done in this light of understanding by generating a formal theory about organizational career in terms of "organizational commitment".

Certainly, this grounded theory research on "commitment to service" beckons a revisiting of the "forward theory" of Glaser (2010). Conjointly, research may be done on the emerging theory of commitment to service in becoming selfless for others and their optimal parallels with major researches about organizational commitment and service.

In addition, further research may be done on the function of leadership in a person's commitment to service and how it can lead to organizational change and transformation. Peter Senge (1994) believes that to achieve such change, one must act sensibly and try to understand the system in which they operate. The theory can serve as a frame of reference upon which stakeholders in various organizations and educational institutions can better understand their behavior relative to their careers and service commitment, with its subsequent effect and interdependence on the organization.

Finally, the substantive theory of "commitment to service in becoming selfless for others" can aid in creating a more encompassing theory that could explain a basic sociological process of not only being "interdependent" (Senge, 1994) but also of being "interconnected" (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Rutte, 1996) in which people in their everyday lives would make their own decisions to become part of something in discovering their own spirituality in the workplace. The theory of "becoming selfless for others" allows stakeholder partners to view their work and their organizations not just a place of work but a way of life. It tremendously grabs the enduring principle that "teaching is a vocation" that leads one toward a concrete path of realizing their institutions' vision and mission, core values, and identity that eventually applies the relevancy of certain factors (*spirituality, community, stewardship, servant-leadership, etc.*) vital for organizational transformation.

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