

Theory Construction & Meaning Making

Psyc 391 - FALL 2005

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“Every living organism is a bodily interaction with an intricate situation and with the universe.”

“Sometimes when one has gained a breadth or depth of experience in an area of endeavor one begins to feel an unclear sense of something that one knows. This knowing is something, is not public knowledge. But it arises through an intuitive understanding of the area that can only come with Experience.”

“We begin best with something that fascinates or bothers us in a more than clear way, something we wish we could articulate better. The topic need not seem profound at the start, but it does need to be in some field or area of life in which one is experienced.”
Eugene T. Gendlin, Ph.D.

Course Overview & Goals

The goal of this course is to have you make a new theory, your very own theory that potentially has relevance and meaning for many (your profession, etc.). Maybe this seems daunting but it is not as hard as it might seem. Creating meaningful theory is the very thing your professors and the authors you’ve read are doing all the time. However, we’re going to learn how to do it a little differently. We’re going to create theory from the inside out, where the rules of logic help fill out our idea but do not contain it.

Making a theory requires expertise in some subject matter then using a range of human capacities such as thinking, sensing, planning, organizing, visioning, and wondering to help articulate and refine it. Making a theory that can withstand external scrutiny starts from within and gradually emerges in little steps with further distinction so that in the end it might be shared with others.

We will study the work of philosophers and psychologists as well as other scientists for what they have to contribute to making meaningful theory. In specific we will study Focusing and a new philosophical practice called ‘Thinking at the Edge’ (TAE) both developed by philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin. This is an interactive course so be prepared to take your very own ideas and work with them in dyads and groups to refine and define them into something focused and useful in the public domain.

Requirements:

1. TAE Workbook, completed exercises turned in weekly.
2. Daily participation in Focusing dyads.
3. Mid-term exam on readings, October 27th, in class, open book.
4. Final class presentation of your theory, 15 minutes. Nov. 22, 29, & Dec. 1.
5. APA formatted theoretical paper, 8-10 pages.

Required Texts:

Focusing Folio: TAE Special Edition.

The Focusing Student's and Companion's Manual Part One
By Ann Weiser Cornell, Ph.D. & Barbara McGavin, 2002.

Webster's New World College Dictionary, Indexed Fourth Edition
by Michael E. Agnes (Hardcover -- August 15, 1999) Paperback recommended.

TAE Readings & Workbook, purchased at CopyMart.

Course Structure:

There are five sections to this course with various steps. Each builds upon the other such that you cannot skip any step. We will start with 2 weeks of orientation and exploring ideas, as well as learning Focusing. We will proceed with each of the remaining four sections. The timing may vary depending on the class, so stay flexible. Here are the sections in order:

- 1) ORIENTATION, Focusing, Core Readings (Sept. 22, 27, 29, Oct. 4 & 6)
- 2) CHOOSING AND SAYING (Oct. 11, 13, 18 & 20)
- 3) EXPANSION OF CENTRAL IDEA THROUGH FACETS (Oct. 18, 20, & 25)
MIDTERM OCT. 27
- 4) CROSSINGS, INHERENCY, & INTRICACY Nov. 3, 8, 10)
- 5) BUILDING THEORY FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN (Nov. 15 & 17)

Your TAE workbook contains the specific steps for each section. We will go through each step prior to your working on it. Sometimes you will work alone on a step, sometimes you will be working with another person. Regardless, this process is your own. Please do not be swayed by the comments of a classmate or myself. To build theory from meaning relies upon using your personal knowledge with help from others, but not directed by others, even other theories.

Final Paper & Presentation

The last two weeks of the course are devoted to the presentations of new theory. You will present your work, even if it is not 'finished', to your class in 15 minutes. You will also turn in an APA style paper at the time of your presentation.

Your paper should follow APA editorial style. As you are not presenting findings from a research project, much of the APA Manual will not be used. However, in presenting theoretical material, there are general guidelines of which to keep aware. We will be looking at several different theoretical papers, finding your particular style will come from your theory. Remember it is always our intention to share with knowledge publicly. Thus, you will need to conform a bit to public language and form if your idea is to be understood.

