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A Realisation of the Hermeneutic Circle

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Definition of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

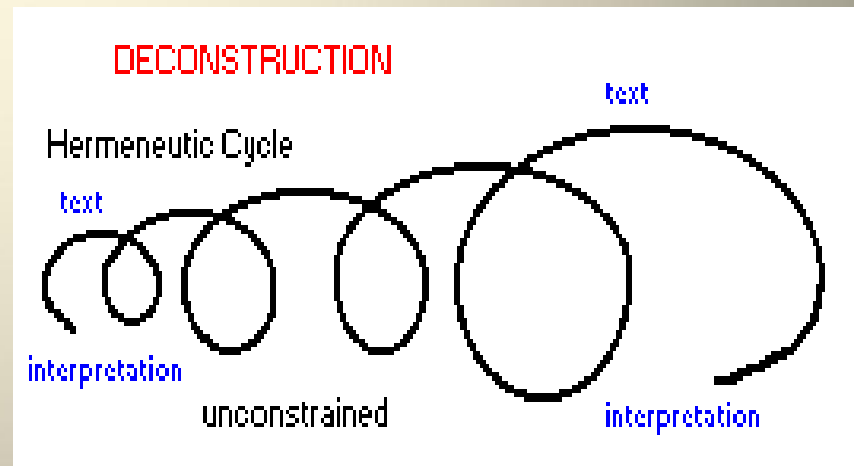
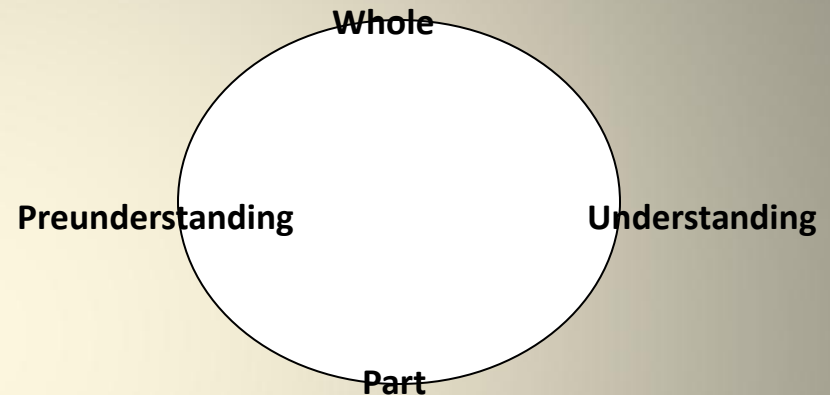
- Hermeneutic phenomenology is a form of phenomenology in which research is oriented toward interpreting the 'texts' of life (hermeneutical) and lived experiences (phenomenology) (Cresswell 2007)
- Drawn from the philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer (Hermeneutics) and Husserl (Phenomenology)
- 'Description of experience mediated by interpretation' Rapport 2005 p.131.
- It is a research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of a phenomenon in the lifeworld of individuals (Ajjawi and Higgs 2007)
- Lifeworld is the world of lived experience (the world as experienced) (Van Manen 1997)

Some key features and terms

- Personal Prejudice: also called preunderstanding or foreknowledge; understanding others through language, history and tradition; the starting point for interpretation and understanding; in order to understand or interpret a phenomenon the interpreter must both overcome the phenomenon's strangeness and transform it into something familiar, thus uniting the horizons of the researcher and researched
- Historicity: awareness of the cultural traditions and social context that govern our prejudices and provide the lens through which we interpret the texts
- Horizon: range of vision; fusing of horizons is the melding of positions through a circular process of understanding, explication (clarification, revelation) and interpretation; the hermeneutic circle is defined by our own personal horizon of understanding
- Texts and interpretation are co-created, reflexive and acknowledge the relationship between the researcher, subject of research and participants (McAuley 2006)
- Based on Rapport 2005 p.131

The Hermeneutic Circle

- Also called spiral, or cycle (McAuley 2006). A spiral better describes the process as it is open at beginning as well as end – openness being indicative of the researchers mind as they interpret the text (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström 2008).
- A dialectic process (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000)
- The circle is a metaphor for understanding and interpretation (Ajjawi and Higgs 2007)
- It is the movement between parts and whole, moving back and forth and emergent interpretation (McAuley 2006).



Context of this study

- What is the lived experience of transition for sojourning students from one educational culture to another?
- Seek to interpret participants' learning journeys/transition and experiences. This includes learning experiences, and events, people and situations that impact on how they have adapted how they study and learn.
- Methodology drawn from work of educationalist Max Van Manen
- Findings emerge from the interactions between the researcher and participants as the research progresses; subjectivity is valued as participants describe a reality constructed by subjective experiences (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007) but researcher also brings intellectual preunderstanding (McAuley 2006)

Context to the development of my Hermeneutic Circle

- Systematic analysis, with built in researcher and participant reflexivity
- Writing and member checking used to move researcher away from pre-judgements and towards a new understanding of the phenomenon through a process of fusing of horizons
- Movement between parts and whole occurs within texts, across texts, and between the stages of the research process so that the process of understanding is circular and iterative
- My circle represents a spiral, starting off with a limited understanding (pre-judgments) building to a more inclusive understanding by fusing horizons. Some whole/part interpretation processes are represented as closed circles but this spiral represented movement and change to me, building understanding through each cycle of text creation and interpretation

A realisation of the Hermeneutic Circle

Text Creation

Understanding by Fusing Horizons

Text Interpretation

Participant's Horizon

Researcher Horizon

Stage 4:

Final participant reflection on themes/essences

Stage 3:

Interviews and participant reflection on emerging themes/essences

Stage 2:

Interviews and participant reflection on 1st Stage themes

Stage 1:

Interviews

Stage 4:

Refining themes/essences of the lived experience of transition; apply themes to all texts

Stage 3:

Develop interpretation further; whole text analysis; structural analysis (part); themes identified

Stage 2:

Develop interpretation of emerging themes/ essences of experience of transition on all texts

Stage 1:

Naïve Interpretation; Thematic analysis

Pre -Understanding

Text Creation Process:

- Semi-structured interviews
- Co-creation of text
- Built in participant reflexivity on emerging interpretations

Text Interpretation Process:

- Hermeneutic circle defined by our personal horizon of understanding
- Whole and part (within and across texts)
- Pre-understanding and understanding
- Fusing horizons

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