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## **Re-Viewing Literature in Hermeneutic Research**

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### **Abstract**

In academia there seems to be a taken for granted assumption that there is one way to do a literature review. This paper argues that the manner of reviewing literature needs to be congruent with the particular research methodology. As an example, the authors explicate reviewing literature in hermeneutic research. The paper begins by discussing philosophical assumptions. The authors then offer personal accounts of their experiences of working with literature in ways that are congruent with hermeneutic methodology. It is argued that the key purpose of exploring literature in hermeneutic research is to provide context and provoke thinking. Literature, which can include anything that provokes thinking on the phenomenon of interest, becomes an essential dialogical partner from which scholarly thinking and new insights emerge. In conclusion distinguishing hallmarks of ways of working hermeneutically with literature are articulated

**Keywords:** Hermeneutic, literature review, Gadamer, Heidegger

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## **Introduction**

The taken-for-granted way of the world assumes that there is a way to do a literature review within a research project that is common across all methodologies. We challenge such a belief, and use the methodological approach of hermeneutics as an example of difference. It is our experience that a hermeneutic research study calls forth a particular approach to literature, which is distinctively interpretive, calling for the reader to engage with text in a manner congruent to the philosophy of Gadamer [1900-2002]. This paper first seeks to articulate the assumptions underpinning hermeneutic human science research. It then draws on the experience of the authors in re-viewing literature in a hermeneutic manner. From these insights, concerns are identified about expectations of academia that limit a hermeneutic relationship with literature. The paper concludes by articulating the features we believe are the hallmarks of a hermeneutic approach to literature within a research study.

### **A hermeneutic perspective**

Hermeneutics refers to the science or art of interpretation, which Grondin (1994) argues is the essential nature of understanding within human science research. As researchers of health practice, we recognise the dynamic and contextual nature of understanding. Through being in the world, we acquire an orientation that is interwoven, inseparably, with our history and culture. We inherit traditions, both formally and informally, through language and the processes of socialisation that mean we cannot stand outside the phenomenon in question because embedded in us are understandings derived from these previous experiences.

But neither traditions nor understandings are unidirectional phenomena. They are dialectical and dialogic. Cognitive and linguistic capacities enable reflection on, and the re-interpretation of, experience. Thus there is a restless back and forth movement, or 'play' (Gadamer, 1982), between tradition and the experiencing, interpreting person. The person's present, past and future are constitutively involved in the process of understanding.

The notion of 'effective historical consciousness' (Gadamer, 1982) or 'historically effected consciousness' (Gadamer, 1982) further explains our inability to consciously or unconsciously deny our historicity. Historical consciousness refers to an awareness of the prejudices governing our understandings, and effective historical consciousness acknowledges that the effect of history influences our interpretations (Hekman, 1986). Successful completion of the act of understanding therefore requires not only a consciousness of one's historical horizon but an appreciation or examination of its effect.

Research that uses a hermeneutic framework acknowledges the limitations of detached observer research. In defining prejudice as how we unthinkingly judge before we have examined all the elements of a given situation Gadamer (1982) challenges the negativity associated with contemporary use of this term and argues that adequate understanding needs to include positive and negative meanings. Indeed, for an argument to have any weight at all, it must be prejudiced (Ihde, 1998).

Gadamer's appropriation of the term 'prejudice' therefore assists an understanding of the way in which particular prejudices come about. It also encourages the consideration of other possible prejudices and recognises the potential for understanding to change and expand (Spence, 2004). The notion of dialogue is thus fundamental to hermeneutic review of literature. The researcher participates in the creation of new understanding through dialectical use of question and answer when engaging with the literature.

### **Engaging with literature/ understanding as participation / participation in meaning**

Gadamer (2007) refers to science's "treasure house of methodically assured truths...[building a] stockpile of knowledge available for random use" (p.102). We argue that a hermeneutic approach goes beyond extracting knowledge from the treasure house for the purpose of making it available as research evidence. van Manen (1990) talks of the hermeneutic manner of turning to "the tradition of one's subject so that the work of others turns into a conversational partnership that reveals the limits and possibilities of one's own interpretive achievements" (p.76). Re-viewing is to bring words, meanings and the thoughts that arise into viewing-afresh. The process and outcome is a reflexively critical understanding (Grondin, 1994) of pertinent literature.

A piece of literature, or text, is "what someone says to someone about something" (Vanhoozer, Smith & Benson 2006, p.19). Both 'someones' are always located within their own time and place in history. Vanhoozer et al. (2006) go on: "The text is a verbal work by which or in which various persons have made or discovered the attempt to say something about something. As such, the text is the site for a work of meaning" (p.20). The text does not therefore present itself as evident truth but rather both reveals and conceals the authors' "conscious and unconscious interests at play" (Gadamer, 2007, p.241). Moreover, it is and will be read by others with similar conscious and unconscious interests.

The traditional approach to critiquing an article is to first consider text itself. This is what we have been taught and are accustomed to doing – go back with the purpose of presenting the authors' main arguments to the reader. Understanding a text from a Gadamerian perspective "does not primarily mean to reason one's way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said" (Gadamer in Vanhoozer et al., 2006, p. 42). It is therefore impossible to pretend that we can take a historical text (albeit a recent publication) and examine it from a neutral and objective stance. As reader, we are always interpreter, and as such always bring our past understandings and experiences. These arise from our positioning in time, place and culture. Within a discipline or research community understandings are held in common. Although there is a time of thinking in which understanding emerges, once thoughts become common knowledge they sink back and become self-evident (Gadamer, 1982). The assumptions, prejudices and pre-conditions are lost and not questioned. Yet this is what is called 'truth' in the natural sciences and these are the building blocks that become foundation for arguments. Our own experience of engaging with the literature in a hermeneutic manner was one where text, were it a research report, a scholarly opinion, or a piece of poetry, became a partner in our journey of thinking. There was a dynamic reflexivity. Our quest was to invite readers to share this thinking experience, recognising that they too brought prejudices to the interpretation.

We assert that literature cannot be regarded as objective truth to be thematised, categorised, critiqued and then pieced together to create an argument. Literature is rather a rich, complex array of meanings, all of which will be interpreted across gaps of understanding, and all of which is representative of a point of view. The purpose of the literature review is therefore not simply to lay down pre-articulated knowledge, merely to show a gap in the literature, or as a means to argue the catalyst for on-going research. The key purpose of such an endeavour in hermeneutic research is to provoke thinking. We expand the term literature to include philosophical texts, fiction, poetry and anything else which engages the reader in a thought-full encounter. The researcher must immerse themselves in the reading, searching, intuiting, thinking, talking, writing, letting-come process by which they discern what matters, and encourage readers to engage in dwelling, pondering, thinking and questioning. Yes, the literature review will present an argument; yes, it is likely to point to the findings, but it is not definitive, not complete, not all-encompassing.

## Our experience

A way to understand a process that emerges is to go back to the stories of how it happened (van Manen, 1990). The authors of this paper thus interviewed each other about their experience of working with the literature in their doctoral research. The data that emerged, and extracts from their theses, are now used to exemplify the nature of reading/writing/thinking, writing that we argue captures the tenants of a hermeneutic approach.

### The 'fore's' to re-viewing

Liz's research asked, "what is the meaning of being safe in childbirth?" It was a huge topic in which just about everything written about childbirth could have been included as relevant. Throughout her reading/thinking/writing process Liz needed to be mindful of the understandings that already coloured her thinking and thus her way of reading. In the introduction to her thesis she wrote:

*I saw women give their bodies over to a hospital system that 'knew best' and 'took charge'. The women who came to the delivery suite brought their own knowing of birth, learnt from generations of women before them. There were problems. There were labours that seemed to get stuck, fetal heart rates that made one's own heart sink in fear, and women who just could not push their babies out and, in pain and desperation, begged for help. There were babies who were born with only a flicker of life, or sometimes none at all. There were women who bled, and bled, and bled. The grapevine stories of the 'woman who died in childbirth' were close enough to create an awareness that even in this well equipped, well staffed hospital, women could still die in childbirth.*

*At the same time, birth just happened. I remember the busy-beyond-belief afternoon duty, when for the first time, I had been left in charge of the whole of the maternity unit with no supervisor to call on. Late in the evening, it seemed there was a minute to draw breath. I walked down the delivery suite to find a family quietly sitting in the dark in one of the small rooms not often used. It was with horror that I remembered them being put there hours earlier in that busy duty. They had been left, unattended and forgotten. Soon after, the woman calmly and beautifully gave birth to her healthy baby. She and her baby, surrounded by her family, had been safe, and were safe. I began to think about this; in relieved hindsight I could see they had not needed 'professional care' to make them safe.*

*Not long after this experience I relieved the sister-in-charge at a small hospital in Vanuatu for three months. I was called late one evening to a birth. The baby was fine, but I had never seen such thick meconium liquor. Neither had I ever had such inadequate suction to ensure the baby did not inhale any liquor, so risking respiratory distress. Where I came from, this baby would have been transferred to the Neonatal Unit for observation over-night. It suddenly dawned upon me that there was not only no neonatal unit in the hospital, but there were no night staff. All the nurses, and the mother, were going back to their beds. It seemed unsafe to leave this newborn baby unattended. The solution was to carry the baby back to my bedroom, where we could sleep beside one another, in the hope that I would awake to altered breathing sounds. My understanding of 'being safe' had become context specific (Smythe, 1998, p.6-7).*

Liz came to her research on being safe in childbirth with countless experiences shaping her understanding. She recounts but a few. We suggest that the starting place when examining the meaning of a literature review is the reviewer. He or she stands at the crossroads of all their fore-understanding. Gadamer (1982, p.239) suggests: “recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust.” Because we belong to history and vice versa, we understand in self evident ways and it is for this reason that the prejudices of individuals, more than their judgements, constitute the historical reality of their being (Gadamer, 1982). Liz had come to see that safety or unsafety was complex, situation-specific and sometimes beyond her understanding or abilities. Her midwifery practice focused on trying to be safe, yet sometimes she knew that the practice itself was unsafe, yet the mother and baby were safe. In scanning the literature she saw a much more black and white picture being presented, where competency seemed to assume the ability to provide safe care. Yet, she knew that as hard as she tried to be safe, sometimes her own practice resulted in outcomes that were less than safe, and paradoxically, her negligent practice could still bring a safe birth.

Heidegger (1995) describes our ready-made understanding in three ways:

*Fore-having* is the understanding we have in advance that allows us to begin to make sense of that which we encounter. When reviewing literature the researcher already comes with understanding that has first drawn them to the research topic and shaped their research question. Liz came to explore the nature of being safe in childbirth, already having deeply held values about safe practice and already knowing being safe was far from simple.

*Fore-sight* brings understanding that sees in advance. As researcher, Liz already had a sense of what journals to prioritise, what authors to search for, what countries were similar in context. Seeing ahead guides the process and pre-shapes reading decisions. Yet, knowing the danger of such pre-judgement, Liz also freed herself to scan less likely journals, to wander the library shelves plucking random books, and to be open to the foresight of others.

*Fore-conception* is the idea, already shaped in advance, of what will be encountered. Perhaps this is the most dangerous aspect of understanding. The researcher already knows in advance how things might link together, has views about what to include and what to leave out, what will work and what will not. The forward direction of the research is already pointing in a certain way. A sense of ‘the what’ that the research may and may not uncover already exists in his/her mind. This is not wrong. It can be no other way. Yet, this already-there-understanding is seldom explored in traditional research methodologies. It would have been very easy for Liz to slip into the theories of competence, to view safe practice as something definable, measurable and achievable. It was through reading Heidegger and developing an ontological fore-conception that questions of safety took on a new horizon of understanding. Thus we argue for mixing research findings with philosophical reading, that one may bring questions to the other.

Researchers come to a text, unable to forget or put aside everything already known. Moreover, it is impossible for them to get inside the thinking of another author, or discern the legitimate and illegitimate prejudices hidden within the writing. All they can do is recognise the “restless to and fro” (Heidegger, 1959, p.75) of the play between both their own already-there understandings and those that may be seen or unseen within the text. Liz did not write her literature review until near the end of her research journey. In that way she brought the questions that had arisen in her reading, writing, thinking to endeavour to ensure that her fore-understandings were kept open and engaged.

### Re-viewing as inclining towards

Inclining towards a particular text is another hermeneutic phenomenon. It is a feeling, a knowing, a readiness to read and re-read:

*There was one article that drew me in. I found it in a sociology journal. It was the title that grabbed me: 'Partuition as a social metaphor'. With fresh clarity, this was back in the 90s, I came to see how there was no truth about the safe way to birth but rather competing truths that reflected the social movements of the times. For example, the medical model was being challenged by feminist, consumer movements. Women were claiming the right to determine the nature of how they went through the experience of birth. And none of this was just about birth itself but was a revealing of wider trends in society. Inclining towards that research, and reading it again and again, drew me to read and think from a much broader perspective. It was a very different voice to the one coming from the midwifery/medical world. I still remember those authors: Crouch & Manderson (1993). Many of the other papers I read have completely left my memory.(Liz)*

Heidegger (1992) refers to the 'inclining' of the thinking experience: "We truly incline toward something only when it in turn inclines toward us" (p.369). The interest 'is' or 'is not'. So it is with one's engagement with literature. One text will incline towards us, set us thinking, hold our thoughts and provoke more thinking. Crouch and Manderson helped Liz to understand that there was no longer a standardised routine management of childbirth. Perhaps she already knew this, but they helped her to understand why. Liz states: "*Inclining towards their paper was like going to wise mentors, people who because they were somewhat removed seemed to have a clearer sense of the big picture. It was refreshing, insightful and provoked thinking*".

Heidegger (1992) asserts that science does not think, even though "science always and in its own fashion has to do with thinking" (p.373). The reason thinking is so elusive is that much of what must be thought turns away. It withdraws and the call to think is lost. We stay with the ideas already before us, accepting them as givens. Heidegger challenges us to make the leap that will take us to the place where thinking resides, the place of difference, and to go with a readiness and willingness to listen. He uses the metaphor of the cabinet maker who has knowledge and skills, but to truly know how to create fine cabinets "he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering in the wood...In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft" (p.379). Thus it is the researchers' relatedness to the literature that enables them to see the potential insights that lie within. To read in a hermeneutic way is to be attuned and engaged. One brings a willingness to be surprised, openness to difference and courage to make the leap into the space of thinking.

### Re-viewing as moving thinking

If one goes towards literature open for thought that may reveal a new horizon of thinking then one is more likely to read more widely:

*There were 3 bits of literature that really helped me move my thinking. One was a bit from C.S. Lewis talking about:*

My dear young friend, the golden rule is very simple. There are only two errors which would be fatal ... On the one hand, anything like a lack of initiative or enterprise would be disastrous. On the other hand, the

slightest approach to unauthorised action - anything which suggested that you were assuming a liberty of decision which ... is not really yours - might have consequences from which even I could not protect you. But as long as you keep quite clear of these two extremes, there is no reason (speaking unofficially) why you should not be perfectly safe (Lewis, 1945, p.310).

*The gap between those two extremes is no gap really. You are left thinking 'there is no way of being perfectly safe'. You either take the risk this way or that way. There isn't perfect safety. That opened my thinking hugely.*

*And there was another bit by Shakespeare:*

I speak of peace, while covert enmity,  
under the smile of safety, wounds the world  
(King Henry IV, Part 2)

*I loved that metaphor of the smile of safety. We assume that everything is safe when in fact it is not. Thereafter I kept looking for the covert enmity, hidden and so often not thought of.*

*And similarly there was a poem by Walt Whitman:*

Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?  
I also say it is good to fall,  
battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won.  
(Song of Myself, 18, 1855)

*If something goes wrong in childbirth there is the assumption that it is the practitioners own fault. But the safe practitioner can be being really safe and things still go wrong, and the unsafe practitioner can still have safe outcomes. So again it was those paradoxes that inspired my thinking, and the research literature wasn't giving me those rich insights. One of the key findings of my research was about the spirit of safe practice which found its birth in this quote. It set me thinking. (Liz)*

The examples above refer to text from literature and poetry. If a key purpose of literature is to provoke thinking, then we argue that texts other than subject related literature are of value. Heidegger draws on Aristotle's notion of '*kinesis*' which is "any kind of change from one state to another" (Feenburg, 2005, p.29). The thinking journey of hermeneutics seeks to open one to thinking again, to thinking afresh, to thinking around; a 'viewing' that seeks to extend one's horizon (Gadamer, 1982). The research report offers 'thoughts'. Yet, "all that stands there stably in itself must be comprehended from out of movement by which it reached that state and holds itself steady" (ibid, p.29). Our experience is that the movement of thinking is richly enhanced by engagement with texts, such as poetry and literature that open doors to the paradox of a notion such as safety. They are the '*arch*' of movement, "an origin that sets in motion that which moves" (ibid, p.29). Without such prompts to thinking one is more likely to stay closeted within the subject/discipline ways of thinking. Instead, for example, Liz was able to see that the spirit of safe practice was a very different phenomenon to the outcomes of safe practice. In an era where most writing on safety was focused on competencies, this was a change of thinking.

### Reviewing as moments of vision

Deb's research explored the experience of nursing people from cultures other than one's own. She was interested in hearing the voices of nurses as practitioners. What was it like to be nursing people from increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds at a time when cultural issues were challenging norms and expectations *both* within nursing and within New Zealand society as a whole? Deb describes her journey from a pre defined notion of what it means to be culturally safe, to 'seeing' the deep complexity:

*The ICN Code of Nursing Ethics states that "[T]he need for nursing service is universal" and that professional nursing service is therefore not restricted by nationality, race, creed, colour, age, sex, politics or social status. Nurses are primarily responsible for those who require nursing care and people in need of care have a right to receive such care regardless of religious and other considerations (ICN Council of National Representatives, 1989).*

*In the context of New Zealand nursing, however, Ramsden (1997) had challenged this code of ethics for seeming to deny difference. Arguing that nursing practice must be 'culturally safe', as defined by the client, she had stated that people should be nursed "**regardful** of all that makes them unique, rather than **regardless** of colour or creed" (p.116, emphasis in the original). The challenge is indeed a valid one. But were these philosophies necessarily antithetical? When I read the following couplet by Pat Parker (1978) it seemed to exemplify the paradoxical nature of respect for difference:*

The first thing you do is forget that I'm black,  
Second, you must never forget that I'm black (p.68).

*I came to see that the most paradoxical facts can be the most instructive. Perhaps the truth reveals itself most fully, not in dogma but in the paradox, irony and contradictions that distinguish compelling narratives. My task as a hermeneutic researcher is to listen, ponder, question, analyse and stimulate thinking. Interpreting stories of nurses' experience required that I explore their meaning and question the relationship between my understandings and theirs.(Deb)*

For Deb, coming to see the paradoxical nature of difference was both a moment of seeing, and a journey of on-going wrestling with what that might mean, and how it might play out. Diekelmann and Dieklemann (2009) talk of the quest to "reach the reached as unreachable" (p.15). Heidegger (1995, p.376) uses the term "augenblick" meaning 'moment of vision' or 'glance of the eye'. In such a moment one sees, but not enough. Yes, she sees that the person must not be seen as 'black' and must always be seen a 'black', but in seeing there is withdrawing of understanding. What does that mean in the person-to-person encounter? How can both be held together in the moment? Seeing is thus also a not seeing. Thinking follows the withdrawal of understanding to raise new questions, to seek fresh insight.

Gadamer (2001, p.113) suggests that hermeneutic phenomenology needs to be "practiced ...descriptively, creatively – intuitively and in a concretising manner...concepts ought to come forward in movements of thought springing from the spirit of language and the power of intuition." In this way understanding spirals, grows, becomes confused, gains clarity, holds contradictions, and recognises paradox. To explain such experience of understanding, hermeneutic scholars talk of the gift of grace (Vanhoozer et al., 2006; Gadamer, 1982). Grace is the act of handing over self to await the coming of a thought while at the same time being an



active player in seeking new thoughts. In the interplay of seeking and waiting, of writing and pondering, of knowing and doubting, tentative understandings take shape. Words craft a message that both reveals and conceals. The author has spoken, but much remains unsaid. The reader reads, grasping, and seeing more perhaps than the author ever intended. Meaning happens in the play, finding its own way, coming into its own (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson & Spence, 2008).

### **Re-viewing as discerning difference**

In choosing what to read, Deb learnt the value of exposing herself to ‘difference’:

*I struggled with the literature that was more anthropological and reporting culture as separateness; the notion of ‘other’ as not part of ‘me’. Reading research from the USA made me very aware of how my values were shaped by being a New Zealander. There was a cultural sameness about how nurse anthropologists approached cultural difference that I did not feel comfortable with. The notion of partnership that had infused the thinking of New Zealand nurses especially in terms of working with our indigenous people, Maori. I found this quote very helpful: “The real stuff of culture in any of its meaning is messy, confusing, paradoxical ...unclear...allowing alternatives and interpretations on some occasions and not on others” (Ritchie, 1992, p.99). It was through rubbing my own cultural views and understandings up against scholars who were also discussing and debating culture from other viewpoints that I came to appreciate difference, particularly as it related to ‘me’. (Deb)*

Gadamer (2006) draws on Aristotle when he says: “what we expect depends on how much insight we have into the context” (p.14). Furthermore, he claims (1998, p.105) “there is no such thing as a transparent text.” Engaging in difference and otherness is critical to deep understanding of something (Gadamer, 2001). In recognising something as strange one first needs to be acquainted with the familiar. Moreover, one needs to be prepared to seek the strange and to go beyond the bounds of the familiar, taken-for-granted discourse of a particular discipline or ‘take’ on a subject. This might involve going back to historical papers, taking from fiction, pursuing literature with a different lens. Encountering difference helps to reveal taken-for-granted assumptions, showing us afresh what we already understand in a non-thinking way (Spence, 2004). Difference raises questions. Difference is the way to thinking. Deb recounts going back to stories of early New Zealand literature to see the difference in attitudes and values expressed by the colonial teacher in the school of Maori children. Well-meaning racism leapt off the page, starkly different from contemporary language.

### **Re-viewing as integrated within**

The nature of the discussion above reveals that we have not stayed bound to the notion that literature is only what is found with the literature review. Deb explains:

*The literature found its place in many chapters throughout my thesis, some of them congruent with traditional structures and some less so. I remember railing against the shape of a thesis where one chapter follows the next in a linear fashion and toyed with the idea of presenting something on a CDROM. This whole business of being in a hermeneutic circle challenges the notion that there is a beginning and an end. Yet I knew too that I had to communicate with readers who would read from beginning to end. For me, the lit review*

*in a traditional sense was only part of the literature reviewing that I needed to do for the whole work.(Deb)*

The hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1982) is the manner of approach, of reading, of thinking, and of writing. There is no logical, linear process that moves from start to finish. Reading the work of others expands one's own understandings, which one takes to the data, to conversation, to writing. Through such immersion one's own thinking comes to new questions. Reading the same text again can draw forth key insights passed over in an earlier read. Similarly, there is no one place for the literature to be cited within a research report. It rather comes-along as a dialogical partner, supporting, building, challenging, showing.

### **We have come to understand:**

In a hermeneutic study, it is the philosophical insights, and the thoughts stumbled across, that can most powerfully call one into thinking and thus shape the analysis and findings of the research. We learnt to be attuned, to incline ourselves to the texts that called, to pursue the complex, confounding answers that drew us into still more thinking even when that was challenging and exhausting. This required us to do a lot of skimming, reading broadly, having a very open mind as to what could be relevant. All the time we were looking, even when we were reading 'off duty'. We now know and trust that ideas do come. They often announce themselves with a fanfare of excitement. You read something and you suddenly 'know'. The 'ah ha' factor confirms. Or, you go away with a thought and mull it, turning it over in your mind until it takes on a polish and a glow. Knowing is an embodied experience, known by peace, joy, conviction, laughter and tears.

We learnt the power of engaging with difference, the stark comparison that shows, for example, the resources of safe childbirth in the western world alongside the mud hut and untrained birth attendant of the two-thirds world. Such starkness raises the question of 'what does it mean to be safe' with a new poignancy. We came to understand that it was through discomfort, dis-ease and a sense of losing our confidence in what we thought we already knew that we arrived at precious new understandings. It was always a journey towards, one with no end, even though at some point we 'stopped' and finished a piece of writing.

We remember the reluctance with which we embarked on the literature review for our research proposal, and in contrast the enthusiasm with which we sought conversational partners (through literature) to compare and expand our emerging thinking. There is an embodied seeking of literature that is integral to the process, but is out of step with the traditional expectation of having a literature review 'done' before the data collection commences. In our experience, the call to read follows. It walks hand in hand with the interpretive phase of working with the data. Only at that stage will a particular phrase leap off the page and hold one's attention in a meaningful way. Only then does congruence between the research and the substantive literature find its harmony.

Writing the literature review was not about painstakingly attending to detail. Rather it was standing back to see the big picture, to grasp the flavours, to discern the meaning between the lines as much as report what was said. The voices absent from the substantive literature became as significant as those who spoke the loudest. The process was about much more than 'writing down'; we came to appreciate how important it was that the literature review be engaging to a reader. Our aim was to draw them into thinking, not to present them with a string of 'facts'. Thus, style, tone and play became important. To call one to thinking is not to 'tell' but rather to take the reader on their own journey of seeing, that they too may have their own call to think.

## **Our concerns**

In our ongoing experience of hermeneutic research we have received feedback from journal reviewers, given and received examiners' reports of master's and doctoral students, and needed to respond to internal reviews within our own Universities review procedures; there are some things that concern us:

Expectations of recency: There is an expectation that the literature review will be of 'recent' literature. There might be some allowance for seminal works, but the drive is: 'have you got the latest material?' There is a competitive push to be first to cite a new publication. But presenting something differently may not always be advantaged by examining recent trends. It was often the difference found in out-dated and non-discipline related papers that brought us our most valuable insights. Green and Thorogood (2004) say, "it is worth remembering that human behaviour changes rather slowly" (p.237).

Pre-given formats: Standard formats for research proposals lock students and researchers into standard expectations. There is little choice but to do a substantive literature review at the beginning of a research project. We argue for research proposal formats that are more congruent with methodology. Yes, we see the value in a quantitative study, of being very confident of the existing research before confirming a research question, but the 'way' of hermeneutic research needs a process that is more open and responsive (Smythe, 2005). It is a completely different approach to research. Therefore, research proposals need to be more accepting of difference and not lock people into structures that may not be appropriate.

Editorial requirements: When we seek to publish an article, we increasingly find journals have a recommended structure and it seems that they are tightening rather than relaxing these. Many journals have specific sub headings and expect a linear progression that suits certain methodologies more than others. Such requirements restrain different thinking. For example, in a hermeneutic approach literature is more likely to be threaded through a research report as a thinking dialogue than boxed as at the beginning of the paper. Thus, we challenge journal editors to be open to a range of formats for scholarly presentations.

Reliance on key words: Another trend that has emerged is for authors to begin a literature review by naming the keywords that have guided their search, and list the search engines that they used. Clearly, this is useful in terms of quickly indentifying 'known' thinking on a topic but it also is supposed to assist judgements about the adequacy of the review. Yet hermeneutic adequacy is more about the depth of thought rather than the narrow isolation of a technology driven search. In our view, there is a risk of engendering a false sense of security for both the researcher and the reader.

## **Hallmarks of a hermeneutic approach to literature**

We suggest there are hallmarks that identify the manner in which literature is addressed in a study that claims to be 'hermeneutic':

- There is a broad range of potentially relevant literature that spans across time, discipline, genres and culture. In our experience, this includes literature and poetry, both of which may be from different eras and cultures. Its purpose is to call 'thinking'.

- The researcher reveals how her/his own prejudices have selected, refined and brought to language a particular view of the literature. This means recounting stories that show how understanding has been shaped and is in the ongoing process of still seeking meaning.
- Literature acts as a dialogical partner to provoke thinking. It is more important to ‘think’ an article than to be able to recount what was said. One phrase may be the catalyst to a leap of thought.
- Philosophical literature is part of both methodology and discussion. While it is often challenging to read, as one grows familiar with both the data and the philosophical notions, there is an inclining towards which draws one into thinking.
- The focus is on identifying meanings expressed through metaphors, similes, images, descriptions and traditional ways of thinking. Insight comes from stepping back to see from a distance, from reading between the lines, from a sudden grasp of a new way of seeing.
- Language is seen as a carrier of hidden meaning. Quotes are included because of the evocative manner in which they capture a notion. It is not just what has been said but the how of the saying that matters.
- Literature pertaining to the context of the study is seen as equally as important as literature related to the topic. Because everything is within its own tradition of time, place and culture, ideas cannot stand outside such horizons.

### **Conclusion**

Engaging hermeneutically with literature is distinctive. It is not the same as doing a literature review in a quantitative study, or one from another qualitative perspective. The nature of a hermeneutic review is that there are few rules to follow; rather a way to be attuned. While there will be a focus that influences the scope of the literature to be explored, precious insights may be found in unlikely places. Philosophical and literary texts can bring questions that help make sense of the life situations under exploration. Questions turn one back to already-read literature, drawing one to read again with a different attunement. Literature provides opportunities for dialogue and scholarly thinking, spanning across time, cultures and contexts. Emergent thinking is often gifted from the prompt of another author. Within a hermeneutic study the place of literature is not to ‘tell’ but to act as a partner in dialogue. Scholarship is born as the collectivity of thinking sparks a new thought. Re-viewing literature is to see through a lens that is always open to the possibility of finding afresh, re-connecting, and ‘wondering’ down new paths. It is a journey that opens new territory and reclaims taken-for-granted and forgotten meanings. To re-view is to re-think and re-say. It is to go back, and in so doing to find the way forward. It is to ‘see’ and to know as if for the first time what one has always already known but forgotten. It is to take others along with one that they too may think their own thoughts. This is what characterises scholarly engagement with literature in hermeneutic research. We ask that academia expands its horizons to accept such difference.

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