A Methodological Approach to Hermeneutic Phenomenology

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Abstract
This article outlines hermeneutic phenomenology as method in the qualitative paradigm. Personal experience and interpretation are critically important to derive a clear understanding of the phenomenon that is being investigated. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of participants. It emphasizes the personalized interpretations of individuals in a particular context. An overview of the methodological approach is outlined, demonstrating the use of different methods to gather data. These include in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, document analysis and questionnaires with open ended questions. Issues of triangulation, credibility, dependability and transferability are addressed. It is expected that readers may have a clearer understanding of research using the phenomenological hermeneutic method.

Keywords: hermeneutic phenomenology, lived experience, phenomenon, data, methodology.

Introduction
A qualitative study investigates meanings and personal experiences constructed by individuals in a particular setting. Hatch (2002) states, "For qualitative researchers, the lived experiences of real people in real settings are the objects of the study" (p. 6). As Creswell (2012) affirms, one characteristic of qualitative research is to develop a deep "detailed understanding of a central phenomenon" (p. 16). Also Lichtman (2006) points out that, "The main purpose of qualitative research - whatever kind - is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience . . . human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse" (p. 8). The constructions are 'unique' as pointed out by Creswell & Poth (2017); Merriam and Tisdell (2016); Freebody (2003) and Denzin & Lincoln, (2013) in their treatises of qualitative research methods.

In a qualitative paradigm, the lived experiences and interpretations investigated are not amenable to numerical analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). For example, in his theory on subject emergence, Goodson (1991a) has demonstrated that his studies are not compatible with quantification. The research which is iterative, dynamic and interactive, builds "a complex, holistic picture, analyses words and reports detailed views of informants" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach in the qualitative paradigm is deemed appropriate to study participants' past experiences and interpretations of a phenomenon.

Heidegger and Gadamer define hermeneutics as"the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding (Verstehen) in different kinds of human contexts" (Odman, 1988, p. 63). Personal experience and interpretation are critical elements to understand the phenomenon that is studied. van Manen (2002) agrees with Slattery (2006) that, "Hermeneutics is the art and process of interpretation that can lead not only to understanding but also to personal growth and social progress" (p. 129). It is viewed as the core philosophy of science for qualitative research as a means of deepening understanding and enriching interpretation.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the personalized lived experiences and interpretations of individuals. In context, a fundamental question is, "What is the experience like?" Holroyd (2007) and Moustakas (1994) describe hermeneutic phenomenology as a constructivist approach. It assumes that multiple socially constructed realities exist and that the "meanings individuals give to their experiences ought to be the objects of study" (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). The interviewees and the researcher are often regarded as "co-constructors of the descriptions and interpretations of their studies" (Hatch, 2002, p. 30).

Edmund Husserl (1964) believes that hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of the unique experience of particular individuals. The purpose is to uncover experience as it is lived. Van Manen (1990) defines phenomenology as "the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them" (p. 8). The context is of signal importance as meaning is derived in a particular historical and cultural situation. According to Husserl (1970), "noema" (that which is experienced) and "noesis" (the way in which it is experienced) are concepts embedded in hermeneutic phenomenology to discover meaning. Husserl (1970) advises researchers to bracket or suspend their preconceived notions so that true meaning may be discovered. The phenomenon must be investigated in an unambiguous manner without imputing personal ideas.

Heidegger (1962) adds another dimension, "exegesis" or interpretation which may be derived through different forms of communication including verbal, non-verbal and written. Heidegger (1962) underscored that understanding and interpretation are influenced by one's 'historicality' or lived experience in a particular historical and cultural context or "Dasein - the situated meaning of a human in the world" (Laverty, 2003, p. 7). He (Heidegger) indicated that there is a "symbiotic reciprocity" between text and context, referred to as the hermeneutic circle, which is indispensable. Like Gadamer (1999), Heidegger maintained that preconceptions are critical to the process of understanding. Bracketing, he concludes is therefore crucial.

In a 1997 account, Hans-Georg Gadamer contends that conversation is critical for mutual understanding and interpretation. He proposes dialogue, in which there is a genuine conversation based on "the art of questioning and of seeking truth" (p. 367). According to Slattery (2006), Gadamer refers to the condition and perspectives of interpreters as 'horizons' and the act of understanding the sense of a text as 'fusion of horizons' (p. 131). Gadamer emphasized that people's perspectives are influenced by their cultural backgrounds and values, which may be expanded through dialogue. He suggests that the researcher needs to maintain a stance of openness to the topic, to formulate questions in such a way that the topic is 'broken open' and something is allowed to emerge, that is, "the truth that the topic reveals" (Gadamer, 1997, p. 363).

Gadamer (1997) mentions the hermeneutic circle in which understanding and interpretation are intricately interwoven. Continuous dialogue and questioning foster new understandings, prompt further investigation and allow for the totality of experiences to unfold. Understanding is rooted in a historical encounter with personal experiences of being in the world (Laverty, 2003).

Gadamer (1997) underscores that "hermeneutics is a process of co-creation between the researcher and participant, in which the very production of meaning occurs through a circle of readings, reflective writing and interpretations" (Laverty, 2003, p. 22). A self-reflective approach (Holroyd, 2007) with a full description of the personal and cultural context is viewed as critical to acquire a holistic understanding. Bentoekoe (1996) agrees with Gadamer (1999) that, "the hermeneutic circle is used to facilitate understanding and open up possibilities" (Slattery, 2006, p. 137).

Method

Participants
Participants should be selected based on the certainty that participants possess real experiences and intimate knowledge about the phenomenon that is studied. A critical question for selection is: "Do these persons have the experience?" Rubin and Rubin (2012) advise that "each interviewee is an individual with distinct experience, knowledge, and perspective not interchangeable with anyone else" (p. 7). The acceptable benchmark is that they are able to provide authentic data from which the essence of meaning emerges. "In *conversational partnerships*, both interviewee and researcher play an active role in shaping the discussion, leading to a congenial and cooperative experience in which the interviewee feels understood, accepted and trusted as a reliable source of information" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 7).

Consistent with qualitative research and the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology representativeness and generalizability are non-issues. Qualitative research allows for variation and sample size is dependent on the judgement of the researcher (Lichtman, 2006). "In some studies, you may have a limited number of participants who are conveniently available to study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 146). The choice of participants and the size of the sample may be determined by the methodology, the detailed nature of the information required, and the number of persons who have the requisite experiences (Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

Design

Sampling methods and procedures
Purposive sampling should be used in the data gathering process. It has been described as a qualitative sampling method whereby researchers "intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). Purposive sampling is justified since certain individuals possess specialist knowledge, capacity and willingness to engage in discussion about the phenomenon. Rubin and Rubin (2005) observe that, "The term conversational partner also emphasizes the uniqueness of each person with whom you talk, his or her distinct knowledge, and the different ways he or she interacts with you" (p. 14). This procedure should be utilized in the selection of participants, as only certain persons would have "lived" the experience (van Manen, 1990).

Since the research method, hermeneutic phenomenology, is based on personal "lived experiences" (van Manen, 1990) and interpretations (Gadamer, 1997), only certain persons may be deemed suitable as respondents for data collection. The most important criterion is that the selected interviewees experienced the phenomenon being studied. Advice may sought from the key informants about potential candidates who participated in the phenomenon, a method referred to, by some researchers, as "snowball sampling . . . a form of purposive sampling" (Creswell, 2012, p. 209).

Data may also be gathered from documents that provide the most pertinent information concerning the phenomenon. Creswell (2012) notes, "Documents consist of public and private records that qualitative researchers obtain about a site or participants in a study" (p. 223). Documents are important since they provide a rich source of information (Creswell & Poth, 2017) and serve to verify the accuracy of some of the data.

Materials

Data Collection

A hermeneutic-phenomenological method of investigation demands the use of multiple instruments to gather data on participants' experiences, interpretations and understandings. Extensive, wide-ranging gathering of data is necessary for "a thorough appraisal" (Slavin, 2007, p. 150) and analysis. Interacting with participants on their own terms and non-participant observation (Creswell, 2012) are key elements of a phenomenological study. The aim is to allow key informants to articulate their experiences in an uninhibited manner without tainting or embellishing the meaning (Merriam, 2009). Detailed descriptions of people's activities and behaviours are recommended by Patton (2002).

In-depth face to face interviews are of paramount importance to unearth participants' experiences and semi-structured interviews are included for focus and direction. During the process, observations are recorded, and memos, journal entries, logs, field notes and anecdotal records are kept. Relevant archival records and documents may be examined and analysed. Questionnaires with open and closed ended questions serve to corroborate data. Methods such as these enhance the validation, and triangulation of data, as well as improve the breadth and depth to the research so that a rich, detailed account may be formulated.

Commentators have pointed out that in the qualitative paradigm, data collection is emergent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1998) and data collected is usually used to determine subsequent data collection activities (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Lichtman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). Consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological method, data collection and analysis are done concurrently throughout the study.

The primary objective is to probe the phenomenon from the perspective of persons who were integrally involved in the situation. A study therefore, must to be geared towards unearthing the insider perspective (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) so that a keen participants' experiences may be unmasked. Merriam (2009) reminds researchers that, "Throughout the research process, there are no fixed procedures or protocols that can be followed step by step" (p. 20). It must be reiterated that the research is subjective based on the experiences of individuals, and meanings can be construed differently, even in the same situation.

Procedure

Obtaining informed consent

Informed written consent must be sought from all participants. Also the purpose of the research should be clearly outlined to them. All data must be kept strictly confidential and used solely for the purpose of the study. The sensitivity of the information divulged must be respected and the ethics of the research maintained.

Also pseudonyms should be utilized to maintain anonymity (Patton, 2002) except where informants give specific permission for their identities to be recognized. In addition, participants' permission (Lichtman, 2011) should be solicited to audio record interviews and conducted only

if approval is granted. If asked not to record certain pieces of information, researchers must comply as all research ethics must be observed.

Privacy and confidentiality of participants

The privacy of all participants should be strictly respected so that there are no unreasonable intrusions into their private lives (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1998). Appropriate environments for conducting interviews should be negotiated with participants. Information should be gathered based on willingness and no coercion. Behaviours, mannerisms, physical characteristics, dispositions, attitudes, health and other sensitive information should be kept confidential so that participants may be stigmatized or violated in any way (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002).

Confidentiality of the research data

Ethical management of data is critical (Patton, 2002). Transcribed data should be properly secured and computer files protected by using an encrypted format making messages incomprehensible to anyone except the researcher (Cohen et al. 2011). Even if some data are perceived to be irrelevant, they should be kept until the completion of the study as they may represent potential outliers (Merriam, 2009; Lichtman, 2006). However, personal information, such as health issues, should be properly disposed of and appropriate software should be used for destroying digital files.

An overview of the methodology

In hermeneutic phenomenological studies, it is important to detail data collection procedures to establish rigour (Patton, 2002). Different data collection techniques, which are described below, may include in-depth and semi-structured interviews, document analysis and questionnaires. These are deemed appropriate for a hermeneutic phenomenological study to unearth in-depth information (van Manen, 1990). The techniques are justified on the basis of their capability to produce diverse kinds of data and uncover different perspectives and insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, these multiple procedures allow for triangulation, "validity" and authenticity of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and credible research findings.

In-depth interviews

A hermeneutic phenomenological study is based on the occurrences and experiences of selected participants during a past event, hence my rationale for using in-depth, open, "one-on-one" interviews, "in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time" (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). "The main advantage of interviews is their adaptability . . . and they elicit data of much greater depth than is possible with other measurement techniques" (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005, p. 134). In-depth interviews are recommended and regarded as the best technique to yield potent information. Open ended questions are asked to facilitate options for responding (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The aim is to build rapport with participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lichtman, 2011), encourage them to detail personal information as well as facilitate easy recall of past experiences.

Nonetheless, semi-structured interviews may be used to maintain the focus of the study, and to suit the "dynamics of the situation" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 362), the interview and the interviewee. These are representative of critical ideas in the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), which give direction to the study. The objective is to trigger related questions and maintain focus without constraining participants, so that uniqueness of responses (Creswell, 2012) may be captured.

In-depth interviews should evolve into rapport and amicable interactions of guided conversations (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) in a relaxed atmosphere, with perhaps intermittent bouts of humour, so participants are able to articulate their experiences in an unconstrained and comfortable manner (Creswell, 2017). Throughout the process, the researcher must be cognisant that he or she is the "research instrument" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 361), and therefore, must make a concerted effort to maintain awareness of any pre-conceived notions, possible bias or subjectivity.

The likelihood of mis-information may be counterbalanced through reiterative questioning, and interviewing several key informants for "validity", and through triangulation or gathering data using a multi-method approach. Ongoing reflective writings, memos, journaling and diary entries should be conducted to bring greater clarity to the information. However, an identifiable limitation of any interview is that interviewees may be selective in the information they divulge or what they want to express. But, interfacing with different informants allows for evaluation of similar responses, and "reduces interviewer effects and bias when several interviewers are used" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 353).

Questionnaires
In this hermeneutic phenomenological study, questionnaires with open-ended questions, aligned with the research questions, should be constructed. The objective is to gather information to build on previous data, and to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). Open-ended questions are justified since the aim is to encourage the respondents to "best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspective of the researcher or past research findings . . . and allows the participant to create the options for responding" (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). A word of caution is that questionnaires should be pre-tested to minimize ambiguity.

Memos, journal entries, and field notes
Field notes, journal entries and memos are necessary to complement the data gathering exercise in hermeneutic phenomenological research. Field notes which may include "the observer's personal and subjective responses to and interpretations of social action encountered" (Saldana, 2009, p. 33), are particularly essential in non-participant observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lichtman, 2006). They allow for recording observations and thoughts about the data collection instruments, techniques and analysis in order to continuously evaluate the exercise, review perspectives and critically reflect on the research processes and practices (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Reviewing and retracing one's thinking can contribute to the emergence of ground-breaking, new ideas which may be seminal to the study.

Reflections
Lichtman (2011) agrees with Porter (2007) that there is no substitute for the reflections during fieldwork. Reflection includes time spent with the original field notes, and writing them up with analytic insights recorded. An attitude of scepticism, awareness, self-questioning and neutrality (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) in documenting personal thoughts, ideas and perspectives should be maintained.

E-mails and telephone conversations
Emails and telephone calls are advised when personal interaction proves difficult. These methods of data collection may be used to seek clarity of information or verify data. Telephone interviews are not regarded as "the preferred method to conduct interviews but "can be useful for follow-up questions after you have read an interview with a person with whom you talked face to face" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 125).

Document analysis

Policy documents that contain relevant official data pertinent to a study may be used. Cohen et al. (2007) note, "Documents, many written 'live' and in situ, may catch the dynamic situation at the time of writing" (p. 201). Documents are prepared officially and intentionally to serve as records of the past (Gall et al., 2005).

Pinar (2011) refers to the "lived meaning of the written documents" (p. 141). Documents, which facilitate broad coverage over a long period of time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), add additional insights and key information and allow for a more rigorous and comprehensive analysis (Merriam, 2009). Excerpts from official documents may be used as relevant quotes as they add to the credibility and authenticity (Cohen et al., 2011) of the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness addresses the issue of whether the study was ethically and competently conducted (Lichtman, 2006). This requirement may be established by detailing researcher credibility and through snowball sampling, a type of purposive sampling (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006) was the method of choice. Creswell (2012) explains that, "the researcher asks participants to identify others to become members of the sample" (p. 146). Key informants are asked to read transcripts to affirm the accuracy and validity of the data (Lichtman, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility, which includes triangulation, member/ participant checking and peer debriefing, is described as the 'truthfulness" and "faithfulness" of the data or findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). To maintain credibility, all interviews should be audio-recorded and personally transcribed verbatim. Participants should be allowed to read the transcripts to validate accuracy.

Triangulation

Triangulation, an imperative in qualitative research, is described as the use of multiple sources of data, to increase trust in the authenticity of the conclusions. It is "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g. a principal and a student), types of data (e.g. observational field-notes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g. documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). Other commentators view triangulation as a comparison of data from different sources, or procedures to substantiate convergence of information to assess the sufficiency of data.

Checking findings against different sources, such as policy documents, can be used for establishing consistency of data and reducing preconceived notions (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Evidence from several avenues facilitates understanding, provides an opportunity to validate the authenticity of data, and allows the researcher to develop a rich, comprehensive report that is both accurate and credible" (Creswell, 2012, p. 266).

Member/ Participant checking

An important method for establishing credibility in qualitative inquiry is member/ participant checking, defined as validation of accuracy by participants (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell. 2012; Lichtman, 2006). Informants should be asked to review transcriptions from interviews to confirm that personal perspectives ideas were accurately and completely represented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Information must remained contextually sound and authentic, It is also essential that the researcher's perspective is scrutinized so that errors may be corrected and "if necessary, collect

more data to reconcile discrepancies, rewrite the report, or include contrasting views" (Gall et al., 2005, p. 475).

Dependability

Dependability is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as, "Whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable across time, researchers and methods" (p. 278). They explained that the research questions should be clearly aligned; the position of the researcher outlined; data collection methods vary; and that the peer review is substantiated (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 2009).

Dependability is established when detailed explanations allow future researchers to replicate the work even though the results may differ (Lichtman, 2006) and determine whether best practices have been followed (Merriam, 2009). As advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1998), all changes should be documented, and new occurrences explained for clarity. The study must demonstrate a sense of completeness so that the findings remained consistent and could be contextually replicated.

Transferability

While most qualitative writers agree that "findings" are not generalizable because of the unique context, individuals and phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1998), some authors advocate transferability of findings (Patton, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011). The idea is that another researcher may "transfer" the results of a study to another environment or determine the level of similarities with his own situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990), "Indeed the premises of naturalistic studies include the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of situations, such that the study cannot be replicated – that is their strength rather than their weakness" (Creswell, 2012, p.148).

Lincoln and Guba (1998) emphasize that readers are entrusted with the task to compare findings. The suggestion is that information about the context, fieldwork, findings and conclusions should be sufficiently detailed so that other researchers may feel confident (Moustakas, 1994) about any transference they may reasonably consider (Lincoln & Guba, 1998; Creswell, 2012).

Confirmability

This refers to whether findings reveal the essence of meaning from the perspectives of respondents and not that of the researcher, and whether researching their experiences again would reveal a similar portrayal (Lincoln & Guba, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Triangulation of data, or the use of multiple methods of collecting data (Patton, 2002), or a "check on data" (Creswell, 2012, p. 142), is one method of establishing confirmability in hermeneutic phenomenological studies. A fundamental criterion to ascertain confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his/her prejudices and preconceptions (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

Denzin and Lincoln, (1994) explain, "Confirmability . . . involves the use of written field notes, memos, a field diary, process and personal notes, and a reflexive journal" (p. 513). Audit/ external audit, reflexivity, and audit trail, which are discussed below, are deemed as three different techniques, to establish confirmability.

Audit/ External audit

Audit, also called external audit, is described as having a neutral researcher evaluate both the process and interpretations of the research. It is meant to enhance the adequacy of data and the

"validity" of interpretations in the study. The outsider may challenge the process and conclusions or give feedback that may encourage subsequent data gathering or more judicious, insightful interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, an external auditor may not have the same understanding as the researcher (Lichtman, 2006), who is much more immersed in the data, and therefore may have conflicting ideas and interpretations which may be problematic.

Reflexivity
"Reflexivity means that researchers reflect on their own biases, values and assumptions and actively write them into their research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 626), to maintain the integrity of the study. The researcher should maintain awareness of personal ideas (Lichtman, 2011), and 'bracket' (Husserl, 1970) preconceived notions. Creswell (1998) believes that qualitative researchers possess personal prejudices which may shape their interpretations. One's personal beliefs, assumptions and background should be outlined for transparency, integrity, honesty and adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), and to address 'skewedness' in every facet of the study, especially data analysis.

Audit trail
Audit trail, according to Creswell and Miller (2000) is a careful documentation of the research path, how it is conducted from the beginning to end, which addresses the rigour of the research. It is suggested that an audit trail should be conducted to evaluate the methodology, results and conclusions and to confirm the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), particularly because the qualitative researcher is allowed the flexibility to alter the course of the study.

Linclon and Guba (1985) recommend six benchmarks for audit trail: 1. "Raw data. 2. Data reduction and analysis products. 3. Data reconstruction and synthesis products. 4. Process notes. 5. Materials related to intentions and dispositions, and 6. Instrument development information" (p. 319). Each facet mentioned should be delineated and justification was provided for every decision.

All decisions regarding the research design, the method, and the process which included data collection instruments, the process of data reduction, steps in data analysis, formulation of themes, interpretations and conclusions should be clearly outlined so that readers may have a clear understanding of the study (Saldana, 2009). "The audit trail enables readers to trace through a researcher's logic and determine whether the study's findings may be relied upon as a platform for further enquiry" (Carcary, 2009, p. 11). Lincoln and Guba (1994) advise that an independent reviewer may give feedback and point to weaknesses in the study so that an accurate, comprehensive, rich, thick descriptive report may be formulated.

Non-participant observation/ Researcher credibility
For investigator credibility, it is important to include disclosure about the researcher since personal information demonstrates relationships with the participants, the topic and the context. According to Creswell, (2013) researcher interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history and prior understandings. Merriam (2009) describes the researcher as the single most important component in qualitative research.

The researcher is the most fundamental data collection "instrument", and is responsible for data processing, analysis, interpretation and conclusions. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain that the role of the researcher is to maintain intellectual astuteness, adapt techniques to the circumstances and . . . clarify and summarize as the study evolves. The researcher interacts personally with the participants, gathers information, immerses in the data repeatedly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), seeks clarification from participants, develops categories or themes (Saldana, 2009), assimilates explanations and interpretations, and derives conclusions. Gall et al. (2005)

claim that the researchers' "viewpoints as outsiders .... help them make conceptual and theoretical sense . . . and report their findings so that their contribution to the research literature is clear" (p. 451).

Conclusion

Hermeneutic phenomenology as a qualitative study is explored. Personal experiences and interpretations of lived experiences are key elements in such research. A particular phenomenon must be investigated to derive the essence of meaning. The procedure for obtaining consent, anonymity of participants and confidentiality of data are examined. Some data collection methods including in-depth interviews, questionnaires and official documents as well as issues of triangulation, credibility and dependability are discussed. How these are related to data analysis in phenomenological hermeneutic studies need to be explored.

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