Career Development and Hermeneutical Inquiry
Part II: Undertaking Hermeneutical Research

Audrey Collin
Leicester Polytechnic

Richard A. Young
University of British Columbia

Abstract

Three hermeneutical or quasi-hermeneutical studies in the career development domain are used to illustrate important dimensions of this type of research. Among the methodology and techniques illustrated are collecting, recording, and analyzing the research material and presenting the interpretative framework. The following significant issues to hermeneutical researchers are addressed: subjectivity, reliability, validity, accessibility, feasibility, and confidentiality.

Résumé

Trois études herméneutiques ou quasi-herméneutiques ayant trait au développement de carrière servent à démontrer les dimensions importantes de ce genre de recherche. Les aspects de la méthode et les techniques illustrées sont la cueillette, la transcription et l'analyse des données de recherche ainsi que la présentation du cadre de référence du chercheur. On y abordera les points suivants puisqu'ils sont d'une grande importance au chercheur utilisant la méthode herméneutique: la subjectivité, la fiabilité, la validité, l'accessibilité, la faisabilité et la confidentialité.

The first paper in this series (Young & Collin, 1988) discussed the peculiarly appropriate contribution that hermeneutical inquiry can make to the study of career development and identified its affinity with the practice of counselling. Many researchers will not have encountered this form of inquiry, for it is rarely featured in standard methodolgy courses. Therefore, the aim of our second paper is to examine some examples of hermeneutical studies in order to identify the procedures that are used, the effects obtained, and the difficulties encountered. There are, however, few examples upon which we can draw in the field of career development. Indeed, the method of research is much less frequently adopted and its procedures are rarely made explicit. We have chosen, therefore, as our examples a few of the career-related studies which, while not proclaiming themselves to be hermeneutical, show such evidence of similarity that they illustrate the points we wish to make. From them we have attempted to distill the significant issues for the potential hermeneutical inquirer.

What is Hermeneutical Inquiry?

The essence of hermeneutical inquiry is *interpretation*. There will be various reasons why we may need or wish to interpret the words or actions of others. Typically, as hermeneutical inquirers, we shall be immersed in a given situation. In order to be able to transcend our own subjectivity, we have to pass through several stages in the research task. First, we need to be aware of and make explicit our own point of view or initial framework. Second, we need to elicit the framework of those we are studying, the actors in the situation. Third, we need to make a close study of this "text" — the actors' words or actions — and examine in detail the words, images, metaphors and themes (Guy, 1967), the relationships between them and between the wholes and parts of the text, in order to develop an interpretative framework. What we have thus constructed does not derive from inference, rather we have created a new order (Shotter, 1984).

In Part I we indicated the criteria suggested by Sullivan (1984) for research to be considered adequate as an interpretation within social science. The analysis should add more to understanding than a common sense interpretation can offer. Our interpretation should be conceived of as an argument, recognizing that alternative interpretations are possible. It should be consistent with the actors' interpretations and recognize the social construction of the actors' situation, with the possibility of change in that situation through the actors' agency. Indeed, while being a far cry from the hoped-for certainties, generalizability and reliability of much of the research undertaken by orthodox scientific methods, hermeneutical inquiry also demands considerable rigour and has, as we shall note later, to establish its own form of validity.

Hermeneutical Inquiry in Action

Three studies will be used to illustrate hermeneutical inquiry in action: Willis, 1977; Collin, 1984, 1985; Sikes, Measor and Woods, 1985. According to Sullivan (1984), Willis' study has all the distinguishing features of hermeneutical inquiry and meets the criteria for adequacy noted earlier. The other two studies are firmly in the career develop- ment domain, and while not unequivocally hermeneutical, display many of its characteristics.

Willis: "Learning to Labour"

Willis' (1977) exploration of "how working class kids get working class jobs" is of particular interest because it exemplified the approach to the study of career which we have strongly advocated. Willis adopted an ecological approach in his recognition of environmental influences upon the boys' early careers and their responses to them; at the same time he is

aware of their subjective experience. Further, the study illuminated the issues of the degree of influence of social class upon occupational choice and of the actor's autonomy and agency about which theorists do not yet agree (e.g., Daws, 1981; Roberts, 1981).

Willis observed 12 working-class, non-academic boys for a period of over two years, had them keep a diary, and was himself a participant observer in class and outside it, as well as in their first job. He recorded group discussions and formal interviews and conversations with parents, teachers and careers officers. In what way can the study be said to be hermeneutical?

First, Willis approached this research as an insider and he himself came from a working-class background; he became deeply immersed in the boys' situation. Second, he makes his initial framework clear:

I view the cultural, not simply as a set of transferred internal structures (as in the usual notions of socialisation) nor as the passive result of the action of dominant ideology downwards (as in certain kinds of Marxism), but at least in part as the product of collective human praxis.   (p. 4)

Third, he elicits from his respondents their frames of reference. For the boys, these contained such elements as authority, the nature of their group, its workings and activities, and the conformist individuals they knew. Willis thereby identifies how the boys are aware of, and thus reject, the "crucial social transactions and contradictions within education" (p. 126) and concludes with the significance of the boys' experience for "reproduction" and "cultural production" (p. 205).

From this material, Willis achieved the fourth element of hermeneutical inquiry; he constructed a new interpretative framework. Sullivan (1984) noted how Willis "attempts to embed individual agency (culture) with the larger structural class dynamics of capitalism (structure)" (p. 162). Willis expressed the relationships between agency and structure in the concepts of penetration and limitation and goes on to draw attention to the "internal interlocutor," the "part of self that accepts the legitimacy of the system even when resisting" (p. 166), the "them" in "us."

Using Sullivan's (1984) criteria, Willis (1977) achieved an adequate interpretation. Willis took his description and analysis back to the boys for them to respond to and check his interpretations for their correctness or truth. He presented an argument drawing on evidence from individuals, the school and society at large. He related wholes to parts. He did not proceed through inference, but created a new order. It is critical and not determinative: it enhances human freedom. Sullivan concluded that it met the criteria of adequacy and saw it as "a critical interpretation of the personal world" (p. 172).

It is a fascinating and insightful text and a powerful argument. We hear and understand how and why "the lads" live in such discrepancy

with their conformist peers; we grasp the terms of reference and the moral order by which they live. This access grants us insight into their world and casts our own taken-for-granted world in a new light. Furthermore, we can clearly see the relevance and coherence of Willis' interpretative framework which emerges from his study and we can follow the argument he critically develops from it. The reader, whether teacher, politician or counsellor, can take his final statements as the starting point for their own action in the "real world."

Other Examples

The study of mid-career change by Collin (1984, 1985) displayed many of the characteristics of hermeneutical inquiry without claiming this label itself. Collin recognized that she was herself undergoing a mid-career change, so that her interpretations derived partly from reflexivity and empathy. Further, she traced the "career" of her research project, which evolved from a study in the orthodox mode through an iterative process into an exploration in which she had to rely for her procedures largely upon her intuition and experience in other fields rather than upon established social science methods.

As well as questioning her initial research framework, Collin (1985) also discussed (1984) the alternative explanations from other theoretical perspectives that could be made of the material she collected. She presented the readers with edited transcripts so that they can assess the quality of her argument and make their own interpretations. Further, she questioned the models she herself constructed. However, although she emphasized the social construction of the interviewees' world and the possibility that they could redefine and change it, she did not return to them to check her interpretation against theirs. Nevertheless, in large measure her study achieved what Sullivan (1984) claims as the criteria for adequacy.

Sikes, Measor and Woods (1985) and Woods (1985) adopted an interactionist approach, based on grounded theory and life history methodology, in their research into teachers' careers. They emphasized the close relationship between the researchers and the teachers studied and the need to share the teachers' culture. After a primary analysis, they returned a distillation of biography to the appropriate teacher for comment. Their analysis proceeded using concepts from the literature. When used to accommodate all the material gathered in the research, these concepts themselves had to change. This process achieved far more understanding than was available to common sense. The researchers here recognized that, in interpreting these teachers' biographies, they are constructing an argument which needs to be able to respond to objections and alternative explanations. Finally, in their hope that this study may have indicated ways in which teachers themselves may be

able to carry out their own research, Sikes, Measor and Woods meet Sullivan's (1984) criterion of an emancipatory praxis. This study, then, largely met all the criteria for hermeneutical inquiry in action.

<div align="center">

THE METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES
OF HERMENEUTICAL INQUIRY

</div>

Hermeneutical inquiry can be undertaken on the same methodological grounds as much other qualitative research; for example, our illustrative studies have used a life history or biographical approach (Collin, 1984, 1985; Sikes *et al.*, 1985) and case studies (Willis, 1977). It also uses some of the techniques for the collection of material employed in other forms of qualitative research. There are considerable differences, however, in the relationship between the researcher and the person studied, in the methods of analysis and synthesis of the material, and in the modes of presenting it to the reader.

Collecting the Research Material

In-depth interviews were used with individuals on one or several occasions in the three cited studies. Variants upon the interview found in other hermeneutical and similar studies are the *group interview or discussion* (Willis, 1977), and the *self-confrontation interview* using video playback of the interview to the interviewee (Valach, 1986). The *critical incidents* interview (Flanagan, 1954) can also be adopted in hermeneutical study. In this procedure, actual incidents and events are expected to be recounted. Additional data gathering procedures used by Willis (1977) include diary, observation and participant observation.

The interview process highlights the fact that, while interpretative researchers share some data gathering procedures with orthodox social science, some significant differences exist in terms of the relationship between researchers and those researched, the mode of recording the material collected, the mode of analyzing it and the reliability and validity sought in it. These various issues will be dealt with later.

Recording the Research Material

Characteristically, hermeneutical inquirers want to be able to generate a *text* for examination and elucidation. The use of audio- and video-recording is seen as particularly appropriate, when transcribed, these offer a literal text. This technique allows the words and behaviour of those studied to be captured without the early filtering-out by the researcher of what is considered irrelevant. It also, and very importantly, records the words of the researcher and so helps identify both his/her initial framework and influences upon the words of the respondent.

Analyzing and Presenting the Research Material

It is at the analysis phase that the pathways of the orthodox and the hermeneutical inquirer diverge significantly and the interpretative approach becomes particularly difficult and challenging. Close attention is paid to the text and the details of words, images and modes of speaking. These details or parts are related to wholes, that is, sentences or paragraphs of the interview, the emerging understanding of the actor's framework, or the emerging interpretative framework itself. Woods (1985) writes of "retaining the teacher's 'ordinary' language for the most part" (p. 23). The repetition of one phrase in an interview (Collin, 1985) proved to be the key to an interpretation of not only that interview but the development of a conceptual model of the others in the study.

In hermeneutical inquiry quantitative or statistical analysis, which assumes the possibility of the aggregation of subjects or certain norms of response, is not used. Initial analysis does not involve the imposition of categories derived from outside the research material itself. Categories and models emerge constantly from the material and have to be ordered, until as Woods (1985) suggested, "saturation" occurs. According to Woods, the ordering principle is the "degree of importance attributed by the (respondent) to the data" (p. 24). From this, categories emerge and are prioritized, as, for example, in Collin (1985). The kind of content analysis made in orthodox research is not appropriate. In the secondary level of analysis, concepts from the literature generally will be used (Collin, 1984, 1985; Woods, 1985).

Both Collin and Woods emphasized the iterative process of research. Collin (1985) began with the intra-individual analysis of each man's interview, and then identifies common themes in all the interviews, recognizing the emergence of categories and refining them. She concluded:

... research is not an *event* but a *process*. It is not a matter of defining objectives and terms of reference, choosing the right methods and achieving end results. It is a continuing process of enquiry, interpretation, refining, further enquiry, interpretation and so on: a hermeneutical circle.   (p. 51)

Because hermeneutical inquiry takes into account both the actor's and the researcher's frameworks, it calls for a presentation of material in its fullest form, including extended quotations (Willis, 1977) and edited transcripts (Collin, 1984). By contrast, orthodox research is sparing of the amount of "raw data" it gives to the reader, preferring to present analysis and tabulations.

Significant Issues in Hermeneutical Inquiry

To adopt a rigorous approach to hermeneutical inquiry, the hermeneutical inquirer has to address several issues: of subjectivity, reliability and

validity, generalizability, universality, accessibility, feasibility, and confidentiality. These issues are not ignored in hermeneutical inquiry; rather, they are treated differently than in the orthodox mode of inquiry. They are hence treated in a different manner — one major difference being the deliberate exposure of the researcher's initial framework and the marshalling of evidence for the argument or interpretative framework which is developed.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity, both on the part of the researcher and the researched, is deemed a problem in orthodox research. In hermeneutical inquiry, however, the researcher seeks, rather than eschews, a close relationship and involvement with those studied in order to gain deeper access into the comprehension of their world.

The subjectivity of the person studied raises the second issue about subjectivity. Traditional forms of inquiry judge this to be beyond the scope of research methods, and look to aspects of an individual's characteristics and behaviour which can be identified through objective measures. In hermeneutical inquiry, the researchers would rely upon empathy, and their own understanding of the situation through involvement and understanding. Close analysis of the text and referring back to the actor for validation of the interpretation made are means of addressing subjectivity in hermeneutical inquiry.

The implications of subjectivity for reliability and validity are recognized. Any potential distortion created by the researcher's initial framework, the involvement with the researched and the research situation is to a large degree dispelled, or, at least, brought out into the open, by Sullivan's (1984) criteria for adequacy: the need to negotiate the account with the researcher, and to present a cogent argument, recognizing all the possible alternative interpretations. Further, as Collin (1984) argued, the charge of distortion is nullified when the material is made directly available to the readers so that they can check the argument and make their own interpretation.

Reliability

Reliability is the term used to denote internal consistency and stability over time, and is regarded in orthodox research as a prerequisite to the methods used. It is clear that the methods employed in hermeneutical inquiry cannot be reliable in this sense. As Sieber (1976, see Miles, 1979) writes of qualitative research generally,

Certain kinds of reliability must be intentionally violated in order to gain a depth of understanding about the situation (i.e., the observer's behaviour must change from subject to subject, unique questions must be asked of different

subjects... there is inherent conflict between validity and reliability — the former is what fieldwork is specially qualified to gain, and increased emphasis on reliability will only undermine that unique function.)   (p. 596)

We have, therefore, to seek other indices of rigour in hermeneutical research: it should be, as Guba (1979, quoted in Miles, 1979, p. 596) suggested, judged as "auditable," "confirmable" and "creditable" rather than the usual "reliable" and "valid." One way to "audit" our study is to repeat it and so achieve — not identical material — but "binocular vision," a recognition of the multiple versions of the world (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 250, quoting Bateson, 1979). We shall also have the confirmation of internal consistency from the process of referring back to the person studied.

Validity

Even where research involves no measurement, the need to establish the validity of the interpretation remains. In regard to hermeneutical inquiry, Sullivan (1984) suggested that validation involves the adjudication of conflicts in the argument. The advocacy of a particular interpretation needs to be based on evidence that shows the probability of the interpretation under the circumstances. As noted earlier, Sullivan suggested several criteria for the adequacy of interpretation, one of which is the achievement of a sustainable argument: "validation goes beyond mere plausibility" (p. 145). Reason (1986) emphasizes that, while researchers *claim* validity, it is more proper to regard validity as being *conferred*.

The first concern of the hermeneutical inquirer is the quality of the researcher as a sensing instrument. How sensitively and effectively has the material been collected? Secondly, how transparent is the research process? Can others see how the material was collected and the interpretation arrived at? Thirdly, what was the quality of the relationship between researcher and the person studied? Was it one in which there was participation and empathy, or was it relatively sterile? Fourthly, what is the quality of the argument achieved in the interpretation? Does it incorporate several perspectives? Has it been negotiated with those involved? Is there a "goodness of fit" with the situation? Is it plausible? Do others find it reasonable? Lastly, is it useful? Can others use the interpretation as the basis for action? If the researcher meets Sullivan's (1984) criteria for adequacy and is able to answer these questions positively, then it would seem likely that validity would be conferred by most readers and users of the research.

Universality and Generalizability

Sullivan (1984) saw the small sample size as a weakness in Willis' work. "To what extent does a small sample of this nature represent a sub-

culture?" (p. 173). The issue of the utility of the single case has long concerned the social sciences (Allport, 1962; Lazarus, 1980) and, because of the pressures of feasibility, will continue. The usefulness and cogency of Willis' work would be a strong argument in favour of hermeneutical inquiry, even if its universality and hence applicability in use may be limited.

Accessiblity

We have already noted that the raw material collected, the details of the research process, and the stages in the argument need to be made accessible to the reader of this mode of research. To achieve this, the research report is inevitably bulky. The reader needs to engage with it in an active rather than passive manner; to work at the argument and, if necessary, to find within the material evidence to contradict it and to construct a new one.

Feasibility

This mode of research calls not only for a considerable expenditure of time on behalf of the researcher, both those studied and those wanting to use the research. Additionally, it calls for a high degree of involvement and the sharing of intimacy between researcher and researched.

   This need for participation has implications for access: not all potential respondents may wish, as Woods (1985) indicated, to engage in such a relationship. Further, it also means that the researcher must exercise not only the technical skills of research, but interpersonal, empathic skills as well. Sullivan (1984) showed how Willis (1977) established trust with the boys, which they themselves acknowledge. Both Collin (1984) and Woods (1985) also referred to the need for support between researcher and researched.

Confidentiality and the Researcher's Responsibility

It is very clear that this mode of inquiry can only be undertaken when confidences made are respected by the researcher. Woods (1985) wrote of the ownership of the data of the conversations by the teachers studied. Willis (1977) clearly kept faith with the boys he studied who said:

... we never got any backlash off other members of staff which obviously meant you hadn't told anybody.   (p. 197)

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the procedures for undertaking hermeneutical research have been identified and illustrated with reference to three specific career studies. This is a mode of research not without its problems, but it

promises much and indeed delivers much to those who venture upon it. As Packer (1985) wrote, it is

...subtle and complex, intellectually satisfying, and more appropriate to human action, embracing the historical openness, the ambiguity and opacity, the deceptions, dangers and delights that action manifests.   (p. 1092)

References

Allport, G. W. (1962). The general and the unique in psychological science. *Journal of Personality, 30,* 405-422.

Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature: A necessary unity.* New York: E. P. Dutton.

Collin, A. (1981). Mid-career change: Reflections upon the development of a piece of research and the part it has played in the development of the researcher. In P. Reason & J. Rowan (Eds.), *Human inquiry: A sourcebook of new paradigm research.* Chichester, England: Wiley.

————. (1984). *"Mid-career change": An exploratory study of the process of "career" and of the experience of change in "mid-life".* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Loughborough University of Technology, Loughborough, England.

————. (1985). The learning circle of a research project on "mid-career change": Through stages to systems thinking. *Journal of Applied Systems Analysis, 12,* 35-53.

Daws, P. P. (1981). The socialisation/opportunity-structure theory of the occupational location of school leavers: A critical appraisal. In A. G. Watts, D. E. Super & J. M. Kidd (Eds.), *Career development in Britain* (pp. 246-78). Cambridge, England: CRAC/Hobsons.

Flanagan, J. G. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin, 51,* 327-58.

Giddens, A. (1976). *New rules of sociological method.* London: Hutchinson.

Guba, E. G. (1979). *Investigative journalism as a metaphor for educational evaluation.* (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory). Portland, Oregon.

Guy, R. (1967). Biblical hermeneutics. In G. Duty (Ed.) *Divorce and remarriage.* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship.

Habermas, J. (1974). *Theory and practice.* London: Heinemann.

Lazarus, R. S. (1980). The stress and coping paradigm. In L.A. Bond & J. S. Rose (Eds.), *Competence and coping during adulthood.* Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Miles, M. B. (1979). Qualitative data as an attractive nuisance: The problem of analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24,* 590-601.

Packer, M. J. (1985). The structure of moral action: A hermeneutic study of moral conduct. *Contributions to Human Development, 13* (entire issue).

Reason, P. (1986, September). *Validity in new paradigm research.* Paper presented to the conference "Emerging Paradigms in Research," University of Bath, England.

Reason, P., & Rowan, J. (Eds.) (1981). *Human inquiry: A sourcebook of new paradigm research.* Chichester, England: Wiley.

Roberts, K. (1981). The sociology of work entry and occupational choice. In A. G. Watts, D. E. Super & J. M. Kidd (Eds.), *Career development in Britain* (pp. 279-99). Cambridge, England: CRAC/Hobsons Press.

Shotter, J. (1984). *Social accountability and selfhood.* Chichester, England: Wiley.

Sieber, S. D. (1976). *A synopsis and critique of guidelines for qualitative analysis contained in selected textbooks.* (Project Social Architecture in Education). New York: Center for Policy Research.

Sikes, P. S., Measor, L. & Woods, P. (1985). *Teacher careers: Crises and continuities.* London: Falmer Press.

Sullivan, E. V. (1984). *A critical psychology: Interpretation of the personal world.* New York: Plenum Press.

Valach, L. (1986, March). *An action theoretical conception of career processes*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the British Sociological Association, Loughborough University of Technology.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Farnborough, England: Saxon House.

Woods, P. (1985). Conversations with teachers: Some aspects of the life-history method. *British Educational Research Journal, 11*, 13-26.

Young, R. A. & Collin, A. (1988). Career development and hermeneutic inquiry Part I: The framework of a hermeneutical approach. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 22:3*, 153-61.

About the Authors

Dr. Richard A. Young is an Associate Professor in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. His current research efforts involve ecological approaches to human and career development. He is also interested in applications of these approaches to counselling.

Dr. Audrey Collin is a Senior Lecturer in Organizational Behaviour in the School of Management at Liecester Polytechnic. Her interest in the study of career started when, as a research fellow at Loughborough University of Technology, she undertook doctoral research into mid-career change. She is committed to the pursuit of a new and appropriate paradigm of social science research.

Address correspondence to Dr. Richard A. Young, Department of Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia, 5780 Toronto Road, Vancouver, B.C., V6T 1L2.