

Developing your question

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You can view the following article on the following website:

<http://www.infiniteconnections.us/heuristic-research-a-review-and-critique-of-the-moustakas-method>

Please look at the following pages for further reflection on the first and second phases.

Phase 1: initial engagement.

“Within each researcher exists a topic, theme, problem, or question that represents a critical interest and area of search. The task of the initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal compelling implications. This initial engagement invites self-dialogue, an inner search to discover the topic and question. During this process one encounters the self, one’s autobiography, and significant relationships within a social context” (p. 27)

When someone feels an internal draw and hears the call from the deepest recesses of the self, it is almost impossible not to notice. This may be something that is being consciously or unconsciously experienced as incomplete and needs to be completed. It may be something that is discordant that needs to be brought to harmony or something that is unclear that needs to be clarified. It may be something that is misunderstood that needs understanding or something that is dissociated that needs to be integrated. Perhaps, it is something that has not been known before that seeks to be known. This first phase is like the attention-getting circumstance pointing to something that cannot yet be seen but has the *smell* of significance that draws any scientist into inquiry. From this intuitive place come hypotheses, theories, and questions that stimulate positivist scientists as well as scientific explorers to begin what may be years or a whole lifetime of research to discover some external truth. It is also the place where the subjective scientist feels a call to discover some internal meaning. From the moment of the call, the researcher may not even be aware of what needs to be done—only that something is calling out, and that to dismiss it is to deny something very important in the self.

Developing your question:

If the topic is not adequately clarified it will be only partially formed; if only partially formed, research will not be able to unfold in heuristic self-inquiry. If the topic is personally painful, the researcher may unconsciously resist the actual personal problem and consider something less threatening as the stated-problem and thus avoid re-experiencing pain. The research will suffer from a split focus as the unconscious self continues to push the whole personal

question into the research that is focused on an incomplete question or another stated question.

Phase 2: immersion.

“Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states. Everything in his or her life becomes crystallized around the question. The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question—to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it” (p. 28).

Something amazing happens when a researcher has surrendered to the call in phase one. When the question has been properly formed, it appears to have a power that draws the image of the question everywhere in the researcher’s life experience. Immersion happens naturally, not through control or planning. Moustakas (1990) states:

If I am investigating the meaning of delight, then delight hovers nearby and follows me around. It takes me fully into its confidence and I take it into mine. Delight becomes a lingering presence; for a while, there is only delight. It opens me to the world in a joyous way and takes me into a richness, playfulness and childlikeness that moves freely and effortlessly. I am ready to see, feel, touch, or hear whatever opens me to a fuller knowledge and understanding of the experience of delight. (p. 11)

The inner focus of phase 2 is not without contact from the outside. In fact there is a continual movement from the inner experience to what it is in the outer that originally stimulated the research. This is followed by a retreat to experiencing internally what is both internally and externally lingering in the presence of the researcher. The call of phase 1 seems to be orchestrating the experience of phase 2 wherein the researcher’s internal experience of the research becomes the “song into which the researcher breathes life . . . because the question itself is infused in the researcher’s being” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 43). It is not uncommon, even in positivist research, that metaphoric dreams provide significant pieces of information needed to continue the research toward the visioned goal.

If there is no call or no immersion into the call, the research will not unfold; it will lack integrity. When the question does not have integrity, the researcher will be unable to remain focused on his or her own felt experience, and will not be able to live the question in his or her waking, sleeping, and dreaming. The formation of a question may appear to be heuristic in that it seems to focus on an experience of the researcher, and the immersion may appear to be full submersion in the topic. However, the question is not a true focus that is coming from the depths and passion of the researcher, and complete immersion does not take place. Instead, the researcher may contrive situations with co-participants, might spend designated

times in research situations which may be many hours of work for days on end. Yet something is missing: the question does not feel alive within him or her self. When heuristic research is initiated to fulfill dissertation requirements for graduation instead of growing out of the very being of the researcher, it is possible that the researcher may not be intimately and autobiographically connected to the question. Immersion requires the whole self to be engaged in the focus of the research by surrendering to it in such a way that the research unfolds, rather than an observing self attempting to control and direct the process to assure that it moves in the right direction. When there is inner conflict between the stated problem and the self-problem, whether the researcher is consciously aware of it or not, focus is easily lost and confusion occurs. If the focus is on something outside the self, an institutional concern, a need for an intervention process, an experience of other people even if those other people have had a similar experience as the researcher, there will be no immersion and self-inquiry heuristics is not happening.