An Invitation to Dialogue: Gadamer, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, and Critical Environmental Education

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Abstract

This paper invites you, the reader, to co-produce meaning around the possibilities and limitations of what Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology holds for environmental education research. Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology is founded on the idea that people make meaning (the hermeneutic aspect) of lived experiences (the phenomenological aspect) through dialogue from a perspective where cognition is a product of a particular time and place. As such, this philosophy provided a solid foundation for a study which researched how five high school teachers made sense of, and engaged with, critical environmental education. This study evolved out of my belief that teachers' perceptions and practices have been marginalized, excluded, or forgotten in theoretical narratives of critical environmental education. In this paper I will share my experiences engaging with Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology and introduce what I found to be the nature, limitations and possibilities of this research frame.

Résumé

Cet article invite le lecteur à découvrir avec l'auteur une signification dans ce que les possibilités et les limites de la philosophie gadamérienne et la phénoménologie herméneutique réservent à la recherche en matière d'ERE. La philosophie gadamérienne et la phénoménologie herméneutique sont fondées sur l'idée que les gens trouvent un sens (l'aspect herméneutique) des expériences vécues (l'aspect phénoménologique) au moyen du dialogue à partir d'une perspective où la cognition est un produit d'un moment et d'un lieu particuliers. À ce titre, cette philosophie a solidement étayé un travail de recherche axée sur la compréhension de l'éducation critique relative à l'environnement qu'ont cinq enseignants du secondaire ainsi que leur engagement à cet égard. Cette étude a découlé de ma conviction que les perceptions et les pratiques des enseignants ont été marginalisées, exclues ou oubliées dans les narrations théoriques de l'éducation critique relative à l'environnement. Dans cet article, je partagerai les expériences de mon engagement à l'égard de la philosophie gadamérienne et de la phénoménologie herméneutique et je présenterai ce que je pense être la nature, les limites et les possibilités de ce cadre de recherche.

The Invitation

This paper is an invitation for you to join in personal dialogue with this text. As I will be focusing on what Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology offered to my research, I encourage you to enter into what Gadamer describes as a dialogical form of textual understanding. It is hoped that you, the reader, will participate in this dialogue, for an understanding of what hermeneutic phenomenology means to environmental education is not locked within the next few pages of this journal, lurking just beyond your current experiences (like so many other things you want or need to read, but never seem to have the time). No, this paper does not represent the treasure chest of fixed meanings waiting to be sorted out by the savvy decipher, with the intention of using a keen eye (and a good dose of caffeine) to fully reconstructing its meaning. For as Gadamer would maintain, the author's intended meaning frees itself for new relationships of meaning each time it is read. Therefore, this text does not represent the expression of just one meaning, intended by me, the author, but rather it is hoped that meaning will ultimately emerge from the interactions between the personal expressions of my interplay with Gadamer's work and your willingness to engage. So based on Gadamer's insistence that attempting to reproduce meaning is futile, I start this paper with the offer that you co-produce meaning with me. I hope you accept.

The Introduction

This paper speaks to my engagement with Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology with the focus of how it influenced my research frame and changed the flavour of my data collection process. As it speaks to the process of co-producing meaning with my participants, I will not be discussing the outcome of my research but rather reflecting on the research frame itself. I will however, provide an overview of my research endeavour and how I came to investigate what understandings five teachers held around critical environmental education. Therefore, the goal of this paper is two-fold. The first is to introduce Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology and the second is to share my thoughts about the interplay between these and environmental education research.

My research aimed to illuminate ways critical environmental education may be understood within educational cultures strongly influenced by Western philosophies, economic globalization, and empirical-analytic scientific thought. It investigated the lived experience and underlying structures of meanings and assumptions surrounding the practice of critical environmental education in order to develop a greater understanding of the contradictions and distortions hidden within everyday interactions.

Throughout this paper I employ the term critical environmental education to encompass environmental education agendas set within emancipatory or deconstruction paradigms (for more information see Lather, 1991), that seek to engage politically with the struggle to move beyond the existing historical, hegemonic structures that reproduce social and environmental injustices. Critical environmental education thus represents a genre of pedagogies that strive to expose the taken for granted assumptions underpinning the content and process of teaching environmental issues while seeking action around injustices occurring as a result of our dominant cultural narrative.

Coming to the Research Agenda

Throughout the twentieth century, formal education systems in modern societies have been in service of the state, and more recently of monolithic transnational business (O'Sullivan, 1999). In the past few decades the direction of Western educational agendas has shifted beyond the needs of nation states to embrace the global transnational world where the continual need of capitalism to expand markets is moving beyond the powers of the nation states themselves. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001) suggest that under globalization, education is being reduced to a sub-sector of the economy as it increasingly becomes a vehicle for assisting growing markets. Furthermore, this movement towards economic globalization mandates that education and educators act as formative institutions and agents to bring about the individual and cultural changes needed for globalized markets to emerge. The relationship between economic globalization, nation state regulation, and education with its insidious movement towards standardized testing and managerial control (Fitzsimons, 2000) disrupts environmental and social justice advancements, both locally and globally, as the conservative function of education allies itself with this current vision maintaining the status quo, thus advancing the agendas of economic globalization.

Arguably, there is an urgent need for educational programs to promote awareness, understanding and collaborative action around the injustices associated with economic globalization (Fien, 1993; Giroux, 1988; Gore, 1993; Jickling, 2001; Lather, 1991; McLaren, 1999; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). Juxtaposed against the hegemonic perceptions of globalization, this need creates contradictions that leave many contemporary educators caught in an identity crisis, confused about their role and the role of education, while torn between the state-sanctioned curricula and their personal values. It is at this discursive nexus where critical environmental education and the transformative role of education become relevant. By aiming to go beyond the conventional, historically cultivated, and socially reproductive agendas of education, educational theories such as critical environmental education call for socially transformative pedagogies and the restructuring of current educational

directions. Although the rhetoric of these pedagogies may weave a rich tapestry of hope, transformation, and vision, practical examples and reflections on what meaning they hold in the minds and lives of teachers is limited (Lousley, 1999).

To discover such meaning my research agenda aimed to understand how five teachers made sense of, and engaged with critical environmental education. Two years previously the participating teachers were students in an Intermediate-Senior Environmental Science course I taught that explored the theory, practice, and applications of critical environmental education. Since I believe their perceptions and practices, set within specific and local settings, have been marginalized, excluded, or forgotten in the telling of official theoretical narratives around critical environmental education, I felt it important to investigate the beliefs, assumptions and stories they used to portray their understandings of, and experiences with, critical environmental education.

As Gadamerian philosophy provided a base for exploring the complexities of these teachers' lived experiences and understandings of critical environmental education, I will provide a brief introduction to Gadamer's main beliefs.

An Introduction into Gadamerian Philosophy

Gadamer represents one of several philosophers who emphasize a shift from pure description of the conscious experience to an interpretation that includes evolving meaning. At the core of Gadamerian philosophy is the belief that the interplay of partners in dialogue has the potential to generate shared meaning through what Gadamer calls the "fusing of horizons" (Gadamer, 1975). This "fusing" occurs because the interpreter of a text, or the listener of dialogue, belongs to and is conditioned by their culture, or as Gadamer would argue, their horizon of tradition. As people interact within a particular historical horizon of tradition Gadamer insists all interpretations are anchored in our social and individual histories. These histories or pre-understandings enter into any dialogical situation with us for they serve as the foundations for our values, assumptions, and relationships.

Because of their pervasive influence, Gadamer claims examination of these pre-understandings, including historical traditions, provides a way towards promoting self-understanding and meaning. He advises that through non-adversarial dialogue there is always the ability to create meaning, but there is never the possibility to arrive at a final, conclusive meaning (Gadamer, 1975). Therefore, meaning is always temporal, situational, progressive, and shared through interactions, implying it is limitless with possibilities, and open to interpretation and reinterpretation. Meaning, to Gadamer, is not stable; it shimmers.

This philosophy differs from classical hermeneutics where text is seen as having definite meaning (Madison, 1991). In contrast to his precursors, and in postmodern style, Gadamer (1975) maintains there is no original, hidden,

or fixed meaning present in text, waiting to be "discovered." Refusing the notion of a fixed meaning, he believes the meaning of a text (or words spoken in dialogue) is never purely a function of the original intention of the author/speaker, but rather equally dependent on the historical situation of the reader/listener. He decenters the author and/or speaker by maintaining that understanding is not about *reproducing* the predefined, intended meaning in as accurate form as possible, but rather *producing* meaning through the interplay of dialogue between the author/reader or speaker/listener. Therefore, he does not seek to reproduce text nor want to purely capture what someone has said in order to find *the* meaning, but instead, seeks to explore opportunities for the production of new meaning generated in dialogue between the text/reader and speaker/listener. The goal of dialogue, for Gadamer, is to reach an understanding that centers less on asserting one's point of view and more on individual transformation.

For Gadamer understanding is produced through the interplay of speakers, or text and reader, in concrete situations. Therefore, meaning (what the words mean in that context) can never be separated from application (how this meaning will be applied in a particular situation). Gadamer (1975) believes it makes no sense to speak of meaning of a text apart from our reading of it. Thus dialogue, whether with text or among individuals, always has something else to say as meaning is produced through an event of disclosure rather than something produced by a text or speaker alone.

Within the promise and possibilities of dialogue, Gadamer lays the foundation for philosophical enquiry. Enquiry is an invitation to dialogue, which in turn mandates openness and curiosity. In this way he departs from earlier hermeneutic endeavours that attempted to devise a methodology for proper interpretation of meaning. Gadamerian phenomenological hermeneutics is not primarily a methodology, nor is it a method of reading or interpreting the "correct" meaning of text or spoken word. Neither is it a process to avoid misunderstanding the author or speaker's intention since Gadamer believes there is no fixed reality in the meaning of the words but rather the words display new suggestions of meaning with each new exploration, invariably influenced by application. Hermeneutic phenomenology is not a methodology but a philosophical endeavour that seeks to explore the process of understanding, or said another way, the happenings that occur when we claim we have arrived at some understanding of ourselves or the world around us (Madison, 1991). Gadamer (1975) states that his interpretation of hermeneutic phenomenology "is not to develop a procedure of understanding, but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place" (p. 263).

Although Gadamer is concerned with acknowledging the historically affected consciousness (Smith, 1991) of the speaker or text, his earlier work did not specify a direct inclusion of a critical based reflection, that being the identification, inclusion, and critique of socio-political infrastructures and

agendas. This point underpinned the famous Gadamer-Habermas debate (see work from either author after 1967 for more details of this debate). Habermas argues that while necessary, dialogue in this hermeneutic phenomenological sense, hides biases and agendas and only through an ideological critique of these hidden assumptions and beliefs can these flaws and distortions be articulated and revealed. In his later work Gadamer becomes more explicit in his belief that hermeneutic phenomenology be open to the traditional horizon of the dialogue partners while also being amenable to a critique of that tradition.

Implications of Gadamerian Philosophy for Research

Gadamer's philosophy has important implications for hermeneutic phenomenology particularly in regard to notions of meaning and truth. The first would be the impossibility of directly reproducing either text or spoken word to achieve the original intended meaning. Because meanings as well as notions of truth cannot be directly grasped through acute listening or correct reading there can never be any final interpretation of text (also implying spoken word). Gadamer (1975) claims the sense of a text reaches far beyond the author's original intention and states, "not occasionally, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author" (p. 264).

Gadamer abandons the epistemological conception of truth as representative of an "objective" condition. Truth to Gadamer does not mean a static, totalizing relationship that corresponds to objective reality, but the idea that the whole itself can "be understood only relatively" (p. xxiii). Truth in this sense necessitates dialogue: the living "give and take" where to answer questions put to us we must "begin to question ourselves" (p. 356). Therefore, understanding is less about reading or hearing the other person "correctly" but rather finding out about ourselves through what emerges in the middle and center of dialogical interplay.

Truth in this perspective is "the disclosure of possibilities for being and acting that emerge in and by the means of playful encounter" or "the self-enrichment and self-realization that occurs as a result of the play of meaning" (Madison, 1991, p. 134). However, the final aim of a dialogical interplay is not to reveal some ultimate meaning or truth of things, but to attain self-understanding through the process of disclosure of reality that occurs through the discursive exchange between speakers/listener and/or text/reader. Thus, meaning exceeds the beliefs of the partners, remains unknown at the onset of the exchange, and emerges through interaction.

If meaning develops through dialogue as Gadamer suggests, what does this mean for the foundation of hermeneutic phenomenology that assumes the lived experiences (phenomenological) are already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced? In the next section I will attempt to address this question and its relevance to my research.

Ontological and Epistemological Issues in Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Ontology, as described by Blaikie (2000), refers to claims or assumptions about what constitutes reality. The ontology of hermeneutic phenomenology underpins the notion of understanding the social world people have produced and the way they reproduce it with their continued actions (Blaikie). The every-day reality consists of meanings and interpretations people give to their own and other's actions, social situations, and the more-than-human environment. Under the paradigm of hermeneutic phenomenology, it is assumed that communal interpretation of largely unarticulated, mutual knowledge, symbolic meanings, motives, and rules make up daily life that is based on taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Blaikie (2000) provides an ontological explanation that is suitable for hermeneutic phenomenology by saying "in order to negotiate their way around their world and make sense of it, social actors have to interpret their activities together, and it is these meanings, embedded in language, that constitutes their social reality" (p. 115). Understandings come to fruition intersubjectively, as members of a particular society, within a historical period, share common meanings and interpretations and maintain them through on-going interactions.

Since Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology makes the ontological assumption that meaning is constructed intersubjectively within a historical horizon, reality therefore, does not exist independently, but rather is a process of how these parties negotiate meaning. This meaning is then used to facilitate and structure social relationships. This ontological perspective suggests there is no neutral or independent way of establishing truth and implies an epistemological focus where what counts as knowledge and what can be known is generated by immersion in the everyday experiences and language of the phenomena (Blaikie, 2000). The concepts and meanings stemming from these experiences are socially constructed. Access to the social world is through descriptions and accounts people use to make sense of their own and other's actions.

As most of reality remains unreflected, occurring in a routine manner, the researcher must attempt to bring the unconscious forward into the conscious realm in order for participants to articulate their daily assumptions and occurrences (Gadamer, 1997). In this way, the researcher is working with the participants to search for meanings around the phenomena. Within this hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm, the researcher takes on the role of co-learner and seeks to be educated by the people involved in the study. This was indeed the case with my research as I was caught up in an intense learning cycle that forced me to reflect on my individual and social pre-understandings. I believe Gadamerian philosophy enhanced the way I engaged with my research methods.

Methods

What I first noticed about engaging with Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology was my desire to move beyond just asking for descriptive answers to explain understandings and/or actions, but to be open to the emerging intersubjective explorations of meanings. The methods I chose were an online chat forum, individual and group interviews, and classroom observations. Each of these succeeded in varying degrees in having the participants accept the invitation to engage in dialogue.

The online chat forum produced less of the engaged dialogue and more short answers to questions or opinions posted by either the participants or myself. This method proved to be limited as time and priority constraints meant the participants rarely logged on. Even thought it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the benefits and limitations of using online methods, using this virtual approach did allow for my own dialogue with the participants' opinions and questions around the role of formal education, life in schools, and what critical environmental education implied and felt like to them. In my research, this forum did not represent a particularly good example of hermeneutic phenomenology. While it provided philosophical reflection into specific ideas, it did not encourage dialogue between the participants about how they made meaning of their daily educational practices. Both the group and individual interview process had more success in encouraging participants to talk freely about their daily activities while actively co-constructing understanding and meanings.

Gadamerian philosophy encourages me to be open to letting the dialogue take on a life of its own. With the assumption of generating a deeper understanding of critical environmental education, all parties engaged in the interview process to discuss the narratives of such experiences and understandings. There were three group interviews. In the first of the group interviews the participants and I met for lunch. Even though I had five general questions to ask them, the three-hour discussion entered into the dialogical interplay that Gadamer spoke of, as we all swapped understandings and examples while recalling experiences and feelings associated with the pedagogical phenomena. The participants each described an experience when they believed they were practicing critical environmental education and what it meant and felt like to them. This discussion was similar to the second group interview as the conversation evolved into an inviting discussion of educational beliefs, daily activities, memorable experiences, and realizations around feelings and emotions. The final group interview, lasting over six hours, was also a warming experience as it involved a long dinner at my house where five friends spoke of their evolving educational beliefs and insight, and vividly described and explained teaching experiences and moments. Instead of specific questions, I had a list of quotes that stood out to me as I transcribed their previous group interviews and I employed these to initiate discussion.

I found these different from other interviews I had conducted, as there was a greater level of descriptiveness around single events with more time allocated for reflections. Like a good story, all took turns to make comments and ask questions, each appropriate to her/his desire to make sense of what we had heard and to reflect on experiences. At various times during these interviews, we were all mesmerized by the stories and our explorations. I found there to be little of the usual specific short questions or answers typical of research interviews, but rather each person spoke using examples that engaged another in the group to comment or share. This interplay provided a thick blanket of stories and experiences of everyday events and illustrated how the individual made sense of those incidents.

I became more interested with the play of understanding that occurred in dialogue between the participants, than in trying to accurately capture each person's specific thoughts. As I did not lead these discussions, I initially struggled with the reality of not having control over the outcome. I was surprised how hard it was to both theoretically and practically give up on the idea of asking question after question with the quest of unlocking the speaker's hidden meaning or understanding. I felt relieved realizing I need not be paranoid about generating *the right* question leading to *the answer* that would capture exactly what the participants meant. By giving up the control of having to find the participants fixed and total understanding of critical environmental education, I entered into the interviews without the common worry of finding their "true" meaning. I was also amazed at where this general acceptance that we were seeking a greater understanding of critical environmental education took the conversations. Until I entered into dialogue with the transcriptions of these interviews, I was worried that the discussions would get "off topic." But when reviewing the transcripts, it was those "off topic" discussions that shed more light on critical environmental education than the ones I thought would be the gems.

The individual interviews, which occurred directly after the classroom observations, focused on descriptions of daily events and lengthy clarification around conscious and previously unarticulated understandings. Even though I asked a few specific questions, my main inquiry was to solicit a metaphor for critical education. This process led to valuable descriptions and analysis. The classroom observations lasted from one to two periods and involved much of what the teachers described as day-to-day occurrences. In each case, the participants invited me to observe some enactment of their understanding of critical education. The individual interviews that followed these observations focused on the teacher's understanding of these enactments. As I witnessed each teacher in action, I did get the opportunity to ask their students questions that invited them to make meaning of what they were doing and why they believed they were doing it. This too was a revealing experience as the students, apart from being curious about me, were more than happy to explain what they were doing and how they understood it.

The few questions I did ask in the individual interviews sought to clarify thoughts, experiences and feelings while attempting to draw out the participants' socio-political understandings of education and its role in society. Questions around what they thought "good education" involved, the role of the teacher, as well as the role of the student, encouraged discussions around the construction of subjectivities in and through education.

With each of these methods the varying ways people interpret and give personal meaning to phenomena became apparent. Hermeneutic phenomenology instigated an enriching research experience.

Strengths and Limitations of Gadamerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Even though Gadamer implies reflection on situational and historical contexts, his work was situated more philosophically than practically. For this reason I chose to include critical pedagogy and poststructural feminism as they allowed for expansion of my interpretation of Gadamer's philosophies.

My inclusion of critical pedagogy offered practical insight into locating contemporary education within the historical tradition of capitalism and allowed me to examine the role of economic globalization in the production and reproduction of ideological foundations of my participants' understandings. This inclusion allowed my work to becoming more in line with Gadamer's later suggestion of including a critique of the socio-political tradition for a deeper understanding.

A limitation that I believe Gadamer did not address, but one feminist poststructuralism allowed me to identify, is hermeneutic phenomenology's tendency to present a seamless blurring of the stories, their authors, how they are told, the writer, and the reader. This blurring is underpinned by the assumption that the writer is capable of capturing and weaving together the truth of "out there" while the reader becomes the voyeur of some private experience. The issue here is with the assumption of subjectivity and how it is represented by a ''unified, monolithic, reified, essentialized, subject capable of fully conscious, fully rational action" (Lather, 1991, p. 120). The assumption of noncontradictory representation is explained by Britzman (2000) who by examining ethnographic assumptions verbalizes my concerns for hermeneutic phenomenology. She states, ''private moments are rendered public, and the goal of understanding—albeit through secondhand knowledge—is assumed to be within reach of the readers . . . it depends on the rationality and stability of the writers and the readers and upon noncontradictory subjects who say what they mean and mean what they say" (p. 28).

Gadamerian philosophy also presupposes the transparency of intentional meaning to those and by those in dialogue, and as such assumes that through participation and reflection, meaning is available to all those participating in conversation. It is to this point that Habermas takes objection believing there are meanings that stubbornly resist attempts to understand them

(Misgeld, 1991). This may be the case, however, I can see how feminist post-structuralism offers insight into some of these seemingly opaque instances by bringing to the foreground unstated assumptions and meanings that lay the foundation or boundaries for dialogue. These unacknowledged boundaries of conversational practice tend to only surface when dialogue is challenged (Pannenberg in Smith, 1991) and so by including the identification and critique of these implicit foundations of language, a greater level of understanding may be reached. Further, and probably more important to this, is the recognition of the constructions of individual and communal subjectivities that partially determine what and how each party comes to understand through dialogue. Following on from Davey (1991), I believe it is not enough for Gadamer to imply that with more careful listening, or a deeper reading, individuals will open themselves more fully to central concerns when disagreements occur. What may be helpful in these situations is a reflection of underlying socio-political belief structures explicit in words and statements that lies entrenched in the constructed subjectivities of each party. Here too is where feminist poststructuralism offers expertise to Gadamerian hermeneutics. Thus, with deeper analysis of the foundations of language and the socio-historical constructions of subjectivity as offered by feminist poststructuralism, I hope to increase my insights into the horizon of meanings and structure that support and inform how my participants make sense of critical environmental education.

Further to this I wanted to employ feminist poststructuralism to probe for the participants' opinions of what traits, perspective, practices, or beliefs they think it takes to be a "good" teacher and what political purposes are served by this construction of teacher subjectivities. In this way I hope to deepen my comprehension of how these teachers make sense of the social construction of what it is to be a teacher and how this might influence their engagement with critical environmental education.

I believe contemporary hermeneutic phenomenological researchers must begin examining the concept of subjectivity as Gadamer does not scrutinize underlying assumptions around cohesive subjectivities in his philosophy. As one who has engaged with Gadamerian philosophy, I believe we should continually disrupt the promise of representing the voices and subjectivities of our participants and the false allure of providing holistic accounts of knowledge or knowing within our studies. Moreover, as Britzman (2000) suggests, the appeal of holistic accounts is betrayed by the presence and absence of language and interpretation where only partial truths can be specified or received due to a fine line between what information or knowledge is given, taken, and left behind. It is this reconception away from a centered subjectivity towards a plural understanding of meaning and its construction that hermeneutic phenomenology tends to omit. Feminist poststructuralism with its concerns about what structures meaning, provided the insight to help me problematise the desire I had for portraying a seamless representation of cohesive subjectivities.

However, Lather (1991) believes that understanding the lived experience offers the only possibility for change. Hultgren (1991) also maintains that hermeneutic phenomenology has the potential to move towards transformative action as it starts with the meaning of the lived experience which liberates individuals to see how they are participating in their own oppression. What I hoped to achieve by employing hermeneutic phenomenology was to listen to the voices of teachers around their understandings and assumptions of education in order to more clearly bring into visibility the structural conditions of how educational beliefs are constituted and so highlight a valuable path for resistance and change.

Specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology has allowed me to address a reoccurring theme in contemporary environmental education research which illustrates the need to hear and understand the voices and stories of educators in order to advance the discourse (Bowers, 1995; Gough, Walker, & Scott, 2001; Hart & Nolan, 1999; Jickling, 2001; MacEachren, 1995; Orr, 1992; Russell, 2000). Furthermore, in respect to environmental education, research has historically been conducted within the quantitative paradigm leading Hart and Nolan (1999) to discuss the potential need for other modes of research. They further suggest "the most intriguing new area of qualitative inquiry involves the use of narrative" (p. 10). I believe hermeneutic phenomenology provides an important frame for environmental education as it seeks to hear the narratives of teacher's practices and understandings.

Additionally, in respect to critical environmental education, there has been a mismatch between the theory and the practice, with a decade of recurring cries for the need to understand this gap in order to work towards reducing it (Greenall, 1981; Sammel, 1997; Spork, 1992). Hermeneutic phenomenology has provided a frame to investigate meanings and actions educators ascribe to critical environmental education, allowing small steps to be made in understanding this gap. For these reasons, I believe Gadamer philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology has much to offer contemporary environmental education.

Conclusion

In summation I could write about how I provided an outline of my engagement with Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology, or about the overview of its ontological and epistemological assumptions, or still, about its strengths and limitations. I could also recap my experiences with using this frame for co-generating meaning around the beliefs and structures that are largely invisible, which influence interactions with critical environmental education. Or I could also sum up the benefits of infusing of poststructural feminism into Gadamerian philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology. However, I think I have said what I needed to say in this dialogue and now I

will leave the analysis of meaning for you to continue. I conclude by extending the invitation Gadamer gave me; to inquire by entering into dialogue around the largely unarticulated mutual knowledge and symbolic meaning of a phenomenon by exploring how the people involved make sense of it, what meaning it holds for us, and how those meanings constitute our reality.

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Notes on Contributor

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