

**PHILOSOPHY AS METHOD**

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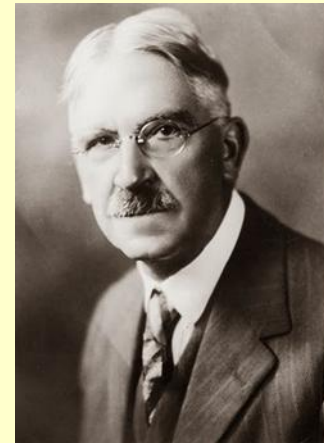
# PHILOSOPHY & RESEARCH METHODS

## JANET ORCHARD, PGR DIRECTOR, SOE



Social Science research is shaped and underpinned by assumptions in these areas of philosophy: Epistemology, Ontology, Ethics.

What varies is how prominently they are discussed, e.g., using a tried and tested scientific theory/method, they are present but not foregrounded; in qualitative social science/the humanities inquiry central to rationale, questions, methodology, and analysis.



If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow.  
- John Dewey



Nel Noddings

# NOT JUST AN 'UNDER-LABOURER' THEORETICAL/PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH



Analyses of 'datasets',  
including cultural, literary  
and media sources in line  
with humanities approaches

Conceptual and theoretical  
aspects of methodology

Policy analysis

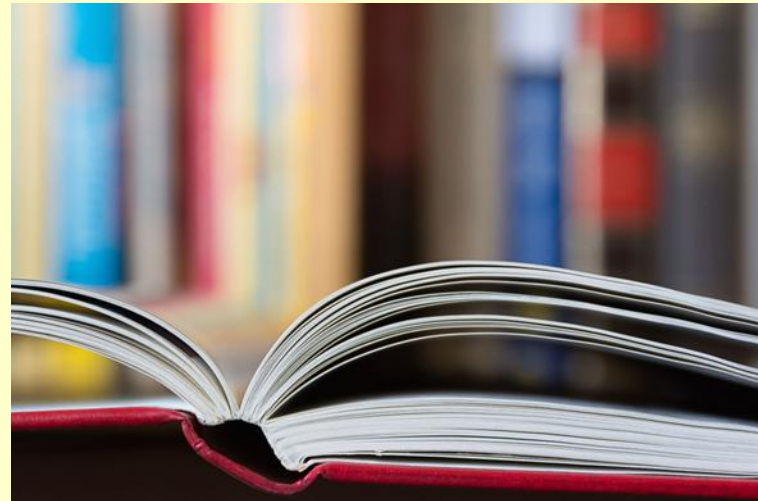
Extensive/Systematic  
literature review

# 'DESK-BASED' RESEARCH?

Shifts perceptions of what we think valuable research is and can be

No need to gather new sense data when addressing questions that lend themselves better to theoretical, literature-based investigation

Related to what's going on' – texts all part of the reality we live in/in which we play a part



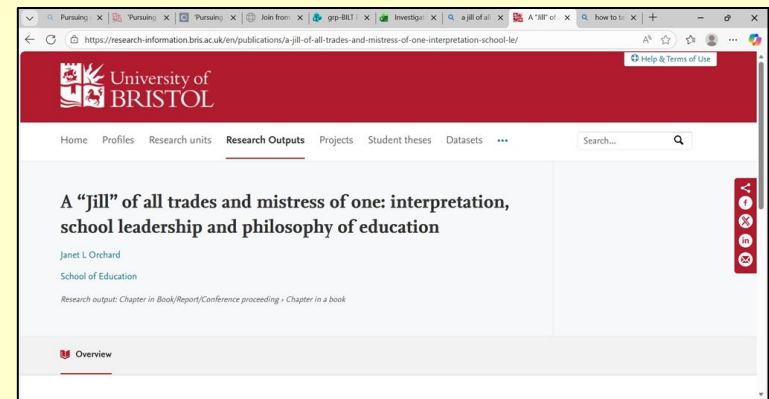
# CROSS/INTERDISCIPLINARY THEORETICAL RESEARCH

E.g., history, sociology, philosophy, economics, psychology, media and cultural studies, literature

Texts the focal point of the research: academic literature; policy documents; reports; literary works; archives; print media; television; film; art works

Empirical data subject to philosophical or theoretical analysis: e.g., quantitative and qualitative survey responses; interview and focus group transcripts; observations and field notes; created artefacts, e.g., Artwork

Key issue: does the research do justice to the complexity and current form of the phenomena?

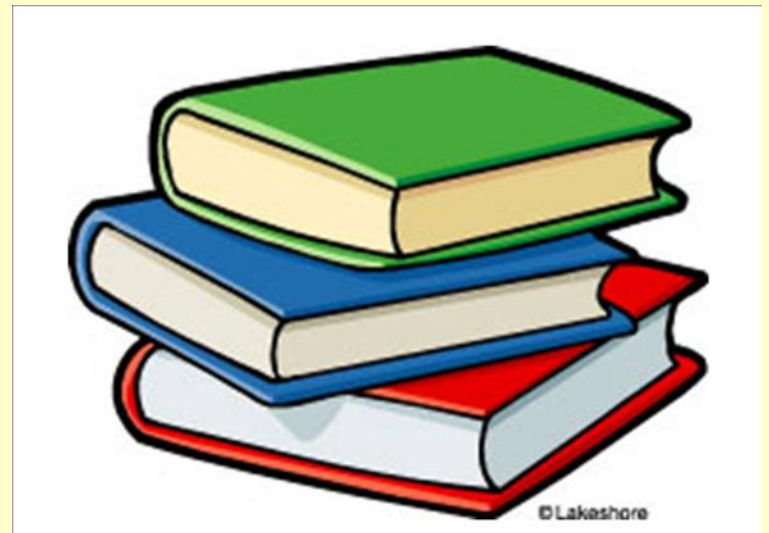


# PRACTICES OF READING AS RESEARCH

Deep and close reading of texts that bring ideas into conversation with authors, although:

" It is perhaps more appropriate to say that this kind of work eventually consists in a *conversation with oneself*: looking at words and conceptual clarifications others have developed, one tests whether they make sense for oneself" (Vlieghe in Fulford and Hodgson, 2016)

NB academic judgement, not opinion, as to whether the words and concepts do justice to the phenomenon in question





# *IST LESEN IN?* TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE **METAPHYSICAL ENTANGLEMENT/INTERTWINING** OF READING FOR PLEASURE IN GERMAN IN ADOLESCENCE IN ENGLAND, ITS IMPACT AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS.

Cat Shail

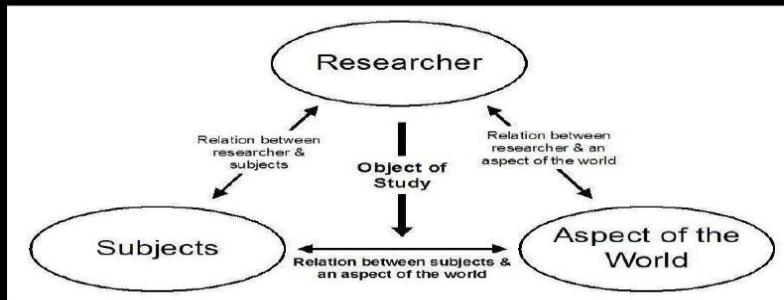
“ ... ohne Bücher, bin ich nicht” (Christa Wolf, 1980)

**Meta aim:** To better understand how adolescents and supporting educational professionals experience reading for pleasure in German in adolescence and its impact.



# PHILOSOPHY AS METHOD

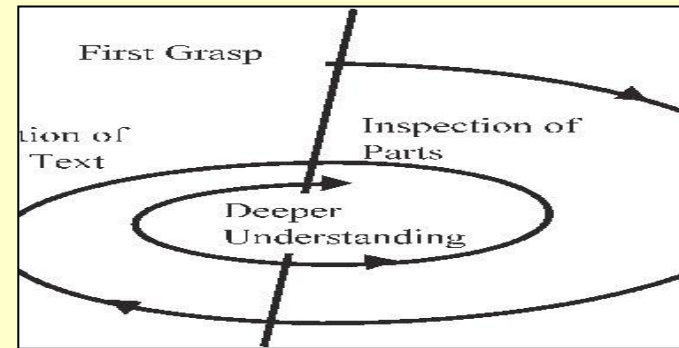
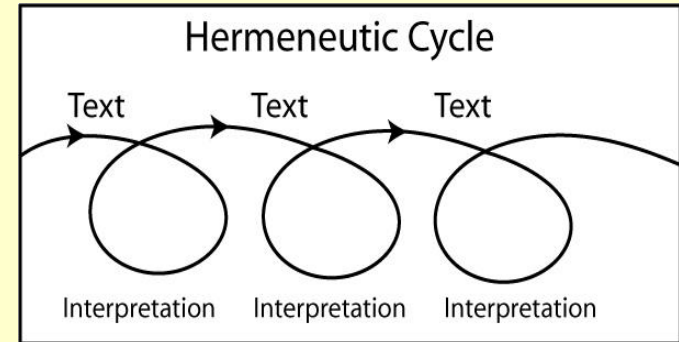
## Hermeneutic Phenomenology



Focusing “on the interaction between the researcher and the data, each participant’s experiences are translated through the researcher by comparison and contrast of accounts with the accounts of other participants discussing their experiences of the same phenomenon.” (Peoples, 2021, p.64-5)

“...record and revise your experiences, assumptions, and interpretations about the phenomenon studied” (Peoples, 2021, p.65)

The “researcher must make personal biases explicit, anticipating projections in the quest for understanding and concentrate on the data during ceaseless distractions and biases that are continually created within. The goal is always to replace current conceptions with more fitting ones through reflection (Gadamer, 1975, p. 269).



# MY APPROACH TO THIS PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY: CASCADING THE “ESSENCE” IN PRACTICE - DATA COLLECTION: 2025

## Part 1 - RT1:

reflective experiential  
written accounts



## Part 1 - RT2:

semi structured  
interviews with  
vignettes



## Part 2 - RT3:

focus group discussion at  
Book Club Workshop  
event



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# MY APPROACH TO THIS PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY: CASCADING THE “ESSENCE” IN PRACTICE - DATA ANALYSIS (EXPLICATION): 2026

‘SIX STAGES’ of explication (Hermeneutic Circle in action)

**STAGE 1 - HOLISTIC READING:** immerse self in descriptive verbatim **data** through intense ‘dwelling’ (reading, rereading and relistening again if required)

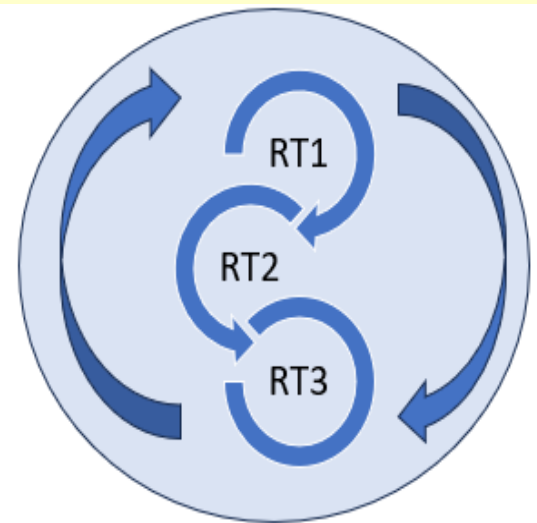
**STAGE 2 - REFLECTING:** create **preliminary meaning units (PMU)** = annotate text with interpretative comment; create summary/bullet points; isolate and label revealing feature/trait = develop significant phrases/statements and group equally = horizontalization

**STAGE 3 - REFLECTING:** create **final meaning units (FMU)** = sort according to broader themes = develop textural and structural description / meanings and cluster/synthesise into themes

**STAGE 4 - REFLECTING:** create **situated narratives (SN)** = reorganise these to align to three RQs

**STAGE 5 - WRITING:** create **general narratives (GN)** from situated narratives = resort as most?, many? and some?

**STAGE 6 - REWRITING:** create **general descriptions (GD)** = present an exhaustive and composite interpretative description of the phenomenon = unite major phenomenological themes into a cohesive whole = craft ‘stories’ = ‘essence’



Systematic researcher journaling element allows for ongoing reflexivity throughout comparison, assimilation and synthesis, and offers an enhanced layer for in-depth iterative interpretation.

(Adapted from van Manen, 1997 & Peoples, 2021)



## TEACHERS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND CLASSROOMS: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO CONCEPTUALISING THE TEACHER

### **Anna Park**

Senior Lecturer in Primary English,  
Leeds Trinity University

Doctoral student (1 yr in, PT, Edge  
Hill University)

50.5 years reading children's  
books, 10 years bookselling, 20  
years in the primary classroom, 6  
years in academia

# A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON A PHENOMENON

## Aims:

- To evoke or conceptualise a teacher that moves beyond the constraints of policy, accountability measures and temporality.
- To read and write as an act within the research – to involve myself centrally
- To enter into a conversation with fictional teachers
- To enter into a conversation with real teachers about these fictional teachers
- To blur the distinction and meet these teachers ‘at the confluence’ (Fulford and Hodgson 2016)
- To apply an attitude of care to a profession and genre I love
- To apply a neophenomenological approach as identified by Rita Felski, which recognises different aspects of critique.
- To apply a philosophical approach to my research as a unified body

# IMAGINE A SCHOOL WHERE...

These teachers worked alongside my 'real' teachers

They engaged in observations and reflections of practice

They 'noticed' what is important, powerful, constraining, damaging

We built a picture of a flourishing teacher



## The act of reading

The ignition of thought within the reader (after Felski)



## The conversation

The movement of thought between interlocutors (after Standish)

# ASSEMBLING THE KALEIDOSCOPE

Literary studies  
Literary critique  
Teacher identity  
Philosophy of education  
Education policy  
Reader response



Through the lens of philosophy



To arrive at a richer  
perspective ...



Journalling  
Reading  
Conversations  
Reading as research



# YES *AND* ... INSTEAD OF EITHER/OR

“The junction, as the space of intersection, helps us to consider how ideas from different disciplines and traditions inform research on education.” (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p. 24)



“Literary works ... if they make a difference, they do so only as co-actors and codependents, enmeshed in a motley array of attachments and associations. They gain strength and vitality from their alliances; “emancipation,” remarks Latour, “does not mean ‘freed from bonds’, but well-attached.” (Felski ,2011, p. 17)



# Reading and writing in and as research

Dr Naomi Hodgson

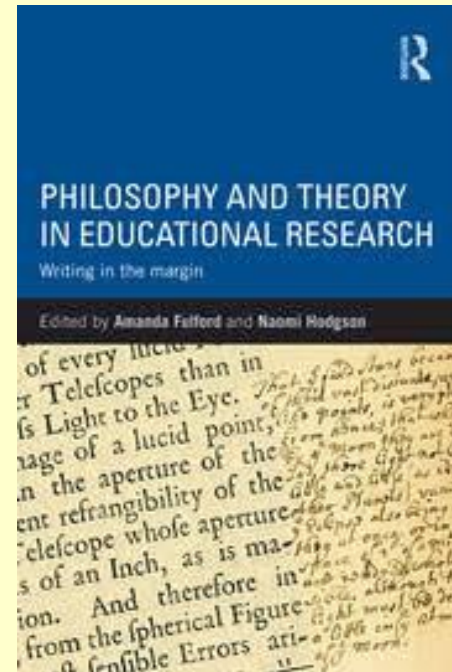
Reader in Educational Philosophy and Theory, Edge Hill University

# FALSE DICHOTOMIES

"questions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and our being human, recur in different traditions" and "this illustrates the intersection of the philosophical with the empirical, and therefore how it is not helpful to continue to shore up a false dichotomy between the two"

this "intersection is a place of confluence ... the starting point for very different kinds of educational enquiry is in the same lived experience of education"

(Fulford & Hodgson, 2016)



# PRACTICES OF WRITING

Writing as report v writing as research

Writing is often presented as the finishing stage, the 'writing up', when everything has been worked out

In theoretical and philosophical work: "Activity is not a prerequisite for reading and writing practices. The starting point is that there is activity in reading and writing itself. The reading and writing do something" (Vansieleghem in Fulford and Hodgson 2016).

As Standish writes: "Sometimes you don't know what you think until you have written it" (2010, p. 11).

The practices of reading and writing are therefore educative in themselves, as part of the process of research.

# DISCUSSION

There are different ways of understanding the purpose of reading and writing in different forms of research.

All research, whether empirical or not, involves reading and writing.

What questions does this raise for you about your own project?

What key theorists or theories are currently shaping your developing proposal?

What issues of research ethics and integrity might arise in a desk-based study?