

Hermeneutic in education with reflection on Gadamer's ideas of conception

Mostafa Mahdian^{1*} and M Javad Liaghatdar²

1- Ph.D student in Curriculum Development, School of Education, The University of Isfahan

2- Associate professor at School of Education, The University of Isfahan

Corresponding author: Mostafa Mahdian

ABSTRACT: Generally Hermeneutic is a useful knowledge, provided that it is employed in a precise and exact framework. Hermeneutic is recognized as the knowledge of interpretation and clarification, though at first developed to interpret Holy texts; with the passage of time the subject of hermeneutic has exceeded the limits of interpreting religious texts and reached the field of several sciences such as history, art, economics, political sciences and even educational sciences. Hermeneutic is considered the theory or knowledge of interpretation. In the present study, the researcher attempts to provide a review of literature of hermeneutic and the relation between hermeneutic and education with a review of Gadamer's views and ideas has been clarified.

Keywords: philosophical hermeneutic, Education, Gadamer.

INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutic enjoys a long history and it has previously been used in interpreting religious texts. Aristotle has used this term to name a chapter in his book "Organon". Following Aristotle, several people like Don Hover have used the term in their works. But the concept of hermeneutic as a specific index of knowledge is a newfound phenomenon and is attributed to modernity. It has been prevailed since 17th century as a term which refers to a particular branch of human knowledge. Changes in the theory of hermeneutic have mostly been in its governing principles and common methods of implementation. At first, this theory has only been used as a method in interpreting religious texts and Holy Books like Bible [Gospel]. In this case, the interpreter who should have been a religious scholar and had to have special jurisdictions, tried to uncover and implement the message and intentions of the book which underlay the intentions of the sender, by resorting to faith, thinking and reflection. Therefore, it was believed that interpreter's attempt should be to discover author's intentions, otherwise guidance would not be met and reflection would be futile (Safayee Movahed & Mohabbat, 2011).

Hermeneutic is a Greek word which means interpretation and paraphrase; its form with the same root came from the messenger god called Hermes. Hermes was an ancient Greek god (Ebrahimi & Sheikh Hasani, 2011; Razavi, 2010). According to Kladniuos, hermeneutic is the art achieving the complete and perfect comprehension of spoken and written terms; Schleiermacher considers it as the art of comprehension. In fact, Hermeneutic is a knowledge that analyzes theories of conception (Azad & Masoudi, 2010). Implementation of this theory in practice has been prevalent in the ancient times and it has been used to interpret and paraphrase religious text in the past. Hermeneutic has undergone so many ups and downs in its history and has been through totally different stages (Saadat, 2007). The method of interpretation has its roots in the belief of sacredness of text. And is a type of delimiting two internal and external ideologies in relation to texts. The history of the emergence of hermeneutic dates back to the middle ages' philosophers and authors. The speech about religion, knowledge and philosophy in middle ages' Europe took the color interpretation. Dante's Feast is considered as one of the most important works of the history of hermeneutic. Due to the acceleration of scientific, economical and political evolutions after 19th century, there was a need for complicated study to understand previous texts. Through these studies methods of interpretation developed and gradually hermeneutic-as it is today- was formed. It is generally agreed that Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is the founder and father of modern hermeneutic (Satari, 2001). His period is the

culmination of inclination to lexicography and linguistics which pays a great attention to syntactic aspects of hermeneutic for interpreting texts. His goal from implementing hermeneutic is to discover author's intention and this view makes him among those scientist who are author-centered than interpreter or text-centered. Schleiermacher thinks of a basic meaning for every text which is intended by the author and he doesn't believe in multiple meaning of a text.

The concept of education

In the history of education, there has been different positioning against the concept of education. From among philosophers and thinkers, the one who thinks more of personal aspects of the existence of human being introduces the education as an attempt to enrich individual's propensities and the one who pays attention to the social aspects considers nurture as a technique of raising an individual into a social person, and the one who is humanist considers nurture as the realization of the real human in human societies. John Stuart Mill refers to nurture as any effect that human is exposed to, whether its source is things, people or society. Durkheim with his special attitude, considers nurture as the act that the adult generation applies to the generation which is not ready and mature to live in society and its objective is to activate and develop individual's physical, mental and cerebral states. Dewey believes that generally nurture is the set of procedures through which a group or society conveys intentions of its school to ensure its survival and continued growth. In texts related to education, training is mostly attributed to the development of intellectual or mental aspects and nurture is attributed to the development of physical, emotional and social aspects of people (Satari, 2001).

Hermeneutic and Education

Principles of hermeneutic are not completely constant but, anyway hermeneutic viewpoint is if we want to work about human we should incline toward hermeneutic principles. In other words, human education requires inclination toward these principles. Nowadays the most recent theories of education introduce the trainee as the most significant element of education and place him in the center of educational activities. This way of thinking has had a certain position in the oldest educational theories. Plato thinks of education as extracting facts that are hidden in the learner or disclosing his awareness of these facts. Two thousand years later, Russo has defended the natural emergence of the child's motives and interests in the direction of goodness, truth and beauty. In Russo's view, the teacher should keep the child away from destructive and corruptive influences of adults' society; until the time he reveals the capabilities that has been given to him. Froebel took effective steps in development and improvement of these people by establishing kindergarten. At the beginning of the twentieth century, John Dewey established his experimental school in Chicago. John Dewey strongly avoided the use of the term "kindergarten" (Razavi and Salah, 2010).

Following John Dewey's profound and penetrative analyses, the idea of education as personal development underwent an evolution. According to Dewey, the odd and surprising thing which exists in human is the capacity and talent for perpetual development. This way the trainee is placed in the center and the original context of educational practice. Considering psychological approaches of hermeneutic, the trainer's role is to bridge the gap between the trainee and himself and the trainee know different behavioral aspects. The trainer decides to understand trainee's spiritual and mental aspects. Paying attention to trainees' personal differences results in trainer's understanding and interpretation of covert facts in their personal and social personality and creates an effective relation between trainer and trainee. Therefore an educational act would form which is based on realities and prejudice will be avoided.

Implications of philosophical hermeneutic in Education

While studying works of hermeneutic philosopher, the thing that would attract our attention most of all is the dialectic, situational and non-linear nature of conception in this type of philosophy. This view toward conception would bear particular consequences for the theory and educational practice; like the fact that in educational view which is based on the philosophy of hermeneutic, practicing would be synonymous to theorization and the border between theory and practice has a conventional and temporary nature and is not considered sheer fact. Studying works and materials of theoretician like Gadamer, Peadraig Hogan (2007) has defined three basic themes of philosophical hermeneutic which have influence education greatly. According to him these themes are:

1- The role of playing in experiences resulting in conception:

Hermeneutic shows that there's a strong link between a phenomenon called game and an identity called hermeneutic. Hogan believes that Gadamer, in order to show the importance of playing in human experiences, has tried to show the degree of its importance through comparison with the importance of critical awareness in the field

of epistemology. Gadamer believes that an actor, or in another term, participant in a game or conversation, gets involved in a game or conversation more than what he is aware of. Although this person might consciously or with his remarkable individual initiatives, contribute to the creation or continuation of a game, but at the same time, he himself would be influenced by the perpetual flow of other people's actions, moves, reactions, anticipations and their limitations and semantic nuances which give the game ardency and enthusiasm, and a totally growing and prospering nature.

During the game a type of context would create a history of assumptions, references, capacities and ... which makes the actions of participants, from their point of view, a meaning, though these actions might be interpreted as meaningless by others and the people outside. The central point of Gadamer's views is that we need to try to understand people's meaningful participations to have the role of a conscious and critical participant, rather than an observer isolated from the situation or an objective analyzer. Though, methodologically, the role of an isolated observer might have positivistic attractions, but might reflect false and unreal image of activities.

2 – The principle of the priority of language over thinking

Basically, it is the language that makes human experiences of the world comprehensible and expressive. According to Gadamer learning a language implies participation in an unofficial practicum process in which interactive language development and acquiring its terms in intertwined with internalizing ideas and special beliefs. In this view, language is not considered as a set of instruments that must be acquired and implemented but as an entity that always plays an active role in forming our thought, practice and speech. It seems that historical effects influence the field of language and its usage the same way they influence individual's consciousness and mentality. Conception is only possible through language and in a tradition and language is like a pattern that unveils human existence and reveals it. Gadamer believes that every person initially is a language chain and these language chains are related to and combined with each other. Language, once again and as always, emerges in repertoire and grammar and brings with itself the endlessness of conversations between every speaker and his audience.

3- The principle of paying attention to humans as a conversation or dialogue

According to principle is in fact the logical consequence, or in other words, the coercive consequence of the last five principles. If we consider mentality, not as a reasoning independent from time and place but as a continued flow of effects that tries to achieve a complete consistency, if we think of these as historical effects that influenced language and thought and keep them fluid and flowing, if we do not treat tradition as having imposing and obedient nature and accept it as a set of plural of what is affecting our past and present heritage, if we admit that human conception is the result of kind of interaction between cultural horizons that are actively influence conception, then there would be a view that considers human capacity for conception and the effects of preconceptions on it. This view is what Gadamer calls "paying attention to humans as a conversation or dialogue". Regarding Gadamer's hermeneutic attitude, it could be concluded that ultimate goal of education is to foster individuals who have readiness for conception. To do so, students should:

- 1- not ignore others;
- 2- be ready to accept differences;
- 3- be ready to challenge their previous assumptions.
- 4- have the capacity to imagine impossible things.

Gadamer believes that a real educated individual is essentially a non-dogmatic person and is always open to an experience that can be provided under the influence of the experience itself. Such a person is always ready for education through interaction with others, because he is always tempted to involve himself with something or someone. An educated person is so sensitive to dialogue that the presence of only another person can make him change his orientations, biases and expanding his views.

According to what was mentioned, the most significant components of the objective of hermeneutic education could be expressed as follow:

- A – Confrontation with self through having doubt in self.
- B – ambiguity and anxiety tolerance
- C – eagerness to endanger the most profound personal beliefs

Hermeneutic from Gadamer's point of view

In investigating Hans-Georg Gadamer's ideas, his thoughts can be considered as something between romantic objectivity and sheer subjectivity. Gadamer's opinions are not the first line or the last line (Pahlavan & Hosseini Shahrudi, 2007). Gadamer's attempt to identify effects on conception and the things that happen in the process of conception decreases his methodological aspect and increases the philosophical aspect of his work. From

Gadamer's point of view, prejudices are essential to conception; isn't the result of it the fact that we have to admit all of our prejudices? Gadamer's answer to this question is definitely negative. His claim does not indicate that none of our prejudices can be wrong. He suggests that we can identify that one prejudice is right or wrong only when its claims are criticized (Vaezi, 2010). Conception is a hermeneutic viewpoint in which the interpreter experiences the tradition and that tradition is formed from experiencing a conception, extends to the present and belongs to the future. He believes that any conception begins with a preconception and these conceptions lead us to a better comprehension (Ebrahimi & Sheikh hosseini, 2010). Gadamer does not have a methodological view toward hermeneutic. He believes that hermeneutic is not the method of comprehension and the art of Humanities methodology but is attaining to the real quiddity of conception and this quiddity exists in philosophy. Therefore, Gadamer's hermeneutic does have the color and flavor of philosophy. Generally, in investigating Hans-Georg Gadamer's ideas his thoughts can be considered as something between romantic objectivity and sheer subjectivity. Gadamer's opinions are not the first line or the last line; His is somewhere in the middle of the way that still continues and this is due to modern hermeneutic's feature that no end could be imagined for it. He believes in an approach for comprehension which is called dialectic approach. He believes that the text and the reader are two sides of a dialogue and a dialogue is considered actual when each side thinks that the other side is right and be ready to fully recognize what is contradictory or even opposite to his ideas. On the other hand, from studying Gadamer's ideas it is understood that text has unlimited number of real conceptions; it means that there as many actual conceptions of a single text as the number of existing horizons, which are unlimited. So the same text – as expressed in Gadamer's writing – does not have a single reality; because if this was true, the possibility of evaluating the infinite number of conceptions would have been created and all the conceptions from the text were not real, while Gadamer doesn't think so. So there are conflicts and inconsistencies in his sayings. One of the turning points of Gadamer's hermeneutic is "fusion of horizons". Gadamer believes that prejudices are so important that the reader's hermeneutic situation is adapted from them. He calls reader's hermeneutic situation "horizon". Since everybody has a hermeneutic situation, so does have a horizon and since the person is always testing his prejudices, his horizon is continually changed and developed and is not fixed.

From Gadamer's point of view, conception is an accident. It is a happening that can't be predicted or directed. It's an involuntary and unrepeatable occurrence that occurs in a dialogue, at a special moment and that moment from Gadamer's point of view is the fusion of horizons and is crucial. The fusion of horizons results as a consequence of question and answer between the interpreter and the text, and conception is the result of this fusion and their unpredictable dialogue, and along with a new conception a new horizon is formed. This is why Gadamer thinks of conception as a productive activity rather than reconstructive; since reconstruction is not literally possible. We are surrounded by our semantic horizon and it is not possible to detach ourselves from our interests, assumptions, questions and expectations and try to fully reconstruct previous semantic horizon.

According to Gadamer, everybody's' prejudices is affected by his chronological, historical, traditional and linguistic situation and everybody has his own horizon and which is different from others. He writes that in reading a text, anyhow, we will experience interpretation, because we read the text with our mind and this is a new interpretation of the text which is completely different from other interpretations. Thus with a little reflection on Gadamer's comments, this is concluded: any text has the capability to be interpreted to an unlimited number of times and has plural meaning, because the horizons are unlimited and as a result the fusion of horizons is so. Thus in comprehending a single text, there is plurality and relativity, and in this regard, Gadamer is considered a complete relativist. But there are a few questions: do all interpretations and conceptions of the text have the same value? Can we talk about "superior conception"? where is the position of the writer and his comprehension of the text? Are all these conceptions lead to self-conception? Since Gadamer believes in self-conception. Gadamer believes that we cannot judge different interpretations of a single text and consider a conception superior to other conceptions; because each horizon is different from other horizons and no horizon is better than the other. To Gadamer, the author is one of the interpreters of the text and his interpretation is not superior to other interpretations by any means and other interpreters are not required to follow him. Thus author's intention is not determinative in the act of conception. Hermeneutic should not forget that an artist who creates a work is not its definite interpreter (Pahlavan & Hosseini Shahroudi, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The capability and application of human sciences can be understood through investigating the historical course of hermeneutic and its main attitudes. But it should be considered that any hermeneutic attitude is presented by special scholars for special application at a certain conditions of time. The governing principles of hermeneutic and the methods of implementing this phenomenon have undergone changes through its history of creation and

development. With the expansion of different fields in academic centers of the world, hermeneutic exceeded the limits of interpretation of religious texts and exceeded the limits of interpreting religious texts and reached the realm of several sciences such as history, art, economics, political sciences and even educational sciences. Hermeneutic in its traditional form was related to religious education and the field of studying religious texts and today has reached the field of modern education. Also, with regard to Gadamer's ideas and his opinions about conception we can help trainees in representing their interests and their motives for making educational decisions.

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