

# Getting inside the question

## Heuristics

Although still considered a form of phenomenology (Patton, 2002), **heuristics** specifically calls upon and is informed by the researcher's personal experience.

"Unlike phenomenological studies in which the researcher need not have had the experience . . . the heuristic researcher has undergone the experience in a vital, intense, and full way" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14).

### A profoundly personal question resides at the heart of heuristic inquiry: It is not suitable for casual interests or ancillary curiosities.

An heuristic process begins with the artist-scholar getting "inside the question" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15), **identifying with the focus of inquiry**.

The question should be one that has puzzled and provoked the researcher for an extended period – it may even be *the* defining question of a life work or worldview.

"Yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social – and perhaps universal – significance" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). Thus, although autobiographical, heuristic research should resonate beyond a passionate individual commitment. **It is self-aware, not self-indulgent.**

Iterative **self-dialogues** follow, with repeated encounters with participants and other sources of information uncovering multiple meanings and extending one's understanding of the experience.

### Seen and unseen combine to form a complete experience.

Then, "at the base of all heuristic discovery is the power of revelation in **tacit knowing**" (p. 20). Tacit knowledge allows a unified understanding of the whole to grow from a subliminal recognition of constituent parts.

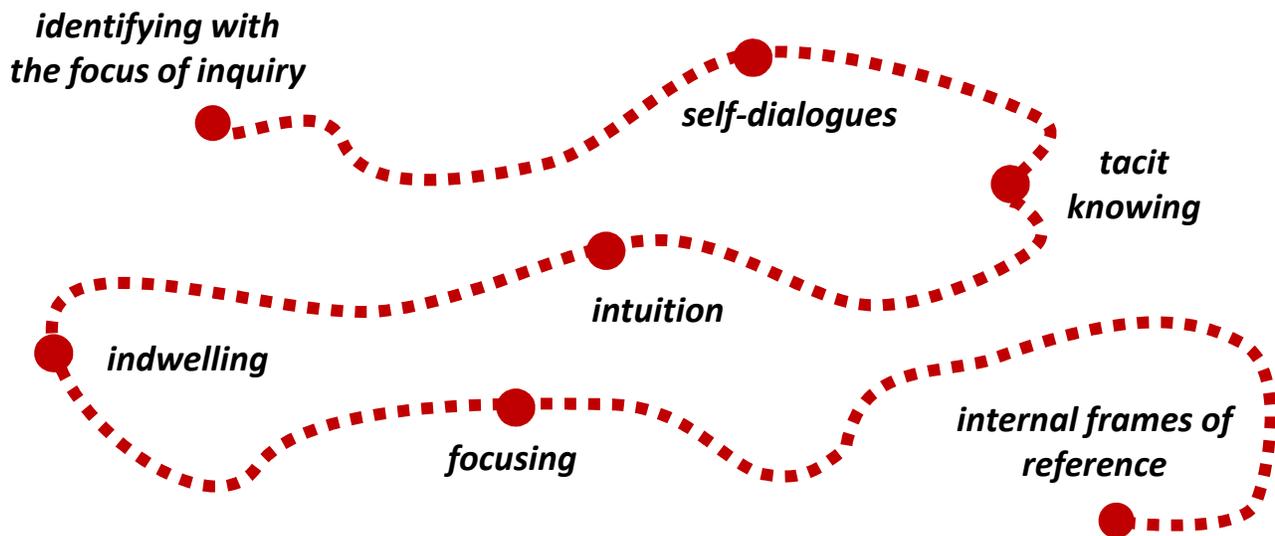
**Intuition** bridges tacit and explicit knowledge in such a way that the artist can discern underlying structures and systems. Then through **indwelling** one can deliberately and consciously turn inward to contemplate facets of the experience, extracting from them every "nuance, texture, fact, and meaning" (p. 24).

In the ongoing discipline of **focusing**, the researcher pauses to attend to ideas and revelations that lead to personal insights and clarify emerging themes.

**Internal frames of reference** are present in both the researcher and the participants throughout the heuristic process. "Only the experiencing persons – by looking at their own experiences in perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and sense – can validly provide portrayals of the experience" (p. 26).

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In turn, these inquiry practices **scaffold** the phases of an artist's imaginative investigation and creative representation of a personally compelling experience or vision: **Initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis**. (Parallels with creative process models are obvious; considering the generative nature of heuristic research, this should come as no surprise.)

### There is an . . .

- **Initial engagement**, in which the artist discovers she is attracted a story, topic, person, idea. She *identifies* deeply with her interest, cultivating passion through . . .
- **Immersion**, in which she "lives the question" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28) using increasingly detailed *self-dialogues* and re-searching.

### The artist nurtures the creative process during a period of . . .

- **Incubation**, in which she allows the growth of "a creative awareness of some dimension of a phenomenon or creative integration of its parts" (p. 29).

### Immersion and incubation are punctuated by episodes of . . .

- **Illumination**, in which the artist's *tacit knowledge* and *intuition* bring about a "breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question" (p. 29).

### "Truth in imaginary circumstances" is found and shaped through further . . .

- **Explication**, in which the artist engages in *indwelling* and *focusing* to apprehend and articulate dominant themes and meanings.

### An artwork emerges during . . .

- **Creative synthesis**, in which the artist manifests her new knowledge and understanding through depictions in narrative, performance, visual, or other expressive mediums.