

## INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING: PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO A UNIVERSAL METHOD

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Investigative Interviewing (I.I.) is a way to reveal “The Experiencing Who.” The interviewer asks the questions, *what-when-where-how* of experience. I.I. allows the interviewer to “get at” the expression of the interviewee. The interviewer asks for an open description rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured or quantified techniques. The interviewer begins with verbal description from the interviewee and maintains the continuity of experience thereby developing a description of *experiential findings* from that which is given itself. It goes beyond the “here” and “now” conceptions of experience into the four dimensional temporal/ spatial flow. Journalists ask who-what-when-where-why-how. I.I. utilizes a verbal way of looking at a situation and asks of “The Experiencing Who,” *what-when-where-how*. The emphasis is upon what (structure) and how (style) of experience rather than cause and effect (why and how). This is a way to disclose what something means for a person situated in a given social context during a particular time in a given location. Thomas Langan centers on the heart of any approach to a method:

The problem with the implicit is that it first has to be made explicit in order to be talked about and methodically reconstructed: a good part of the work of the social sciences.<sup>1</sup>

For this approach I.I. reveals experience interrelated in personal and social horizons. It is a way of talking-with (not a talking to) a person (or persons) who has been selected to be interviewed for a research project in the humanities. Phenomena which are relevant to the human dimension are particularly elusive in depth, complexity and fullness when explained away by mathematical research methods. I.I. is a way of staying-with the experience in that it begins with and maintains the continuity of experience.

I.I. differs from participant observation in that the researcher does not necessarily have to participate in the experience first hand. Participant observation is an interpersonal process in the daily life of a person (or persons) researched, openly or covertly by the researcher, observing what happens, listening to what is said and questioning of those involved. Participant observation can research “before, during and after.” I.I. can reach this through reflection of the interviewee.

I.I. differs from the structure of a survey or a questionnaire in that it is direct, personal and flexible. The interviewee can explain inconsistencies in response and give clarification to that which appears vague to the

interviewer within the interview.

A spontaneous experiential verbal description becomes the departure from which the I.I. approach proceeds. It is the pursuit of the deeper and inexhaustible richness of meaning possibilities which are involved in a phenomenon which distinguishes I.I. from merely a “reporting” journalistic style interview. It establishes and maintains the continuity and depth of what journalists intend with literary description. Although the interviewer does not “go through” the experienced phenomenon with the interviewee it is the interviewee’s meaning which guides the conversation. The phenomenon is contextualized in the interviewee’s life and the overall meaning which is displayed. This approach of talking-with another is utilized to disclose and clarify presupposed or assumed understanding.

When we are engaged in events and meaning, in conversation, the vitality of dialogue appears. This vitality is guided by the ongoingness of experience. It is not reduced to idle chatter or directionless conversing. Dialogue is a way of staying-with a theme, soliciting thoughtful response as well as spontaneous clarification within which the I.I. occurs. The interviewer becomes familiar-with the initial verbal description of the experienced phenomenon. From this repeated going over the initial description, when contrasted and compared with what is already theoretically or experientially known, will arise questions directed toward confirmation, correction, elaboration or rejection during subsequent I.I. The interviewee is given a review of the previous I.I. and asked if there are any thoughts, questions, correctives or elaborations. In this interview, the vitality of dialogue guided by a shared commitment to movement further and deeper into specific aspects of the experienced phenomenon comes into focus. From questions which arise from both interviewer and interviewee will emerge further possible options to follow. In this way descriptions provide a meaning context within which to disclose the self-experienced understanding of the interviewee.

Etymologically the word “method” means “a way to,” that is “a way of investigation.” The interviewer approaches the interviewee with four aspects of contextualization to disclose “The Experiencing Who,” *what-when-where-how*. The interviewer keeps this time and space intersection in focus to ask questions:

# How

## What + When

### Where

Figure I

#### “The Experiencing Who”

This figure displays: 1) *what*, what is, structure. The structure of the phenomenon is the universal aspect; 2) *when*, at what time. Is the temporal location in which the phenomenon occurs; 3) *where*, in or at what place. Is the spatial location in which the phenomenon occurs; 4) *how*, in what way, style. How centers on the phenomenon on the ground of that which is appropriate to the particular experience. I.I. is founded upon the four dimensional temporal/ spatial flow. From these the *why* emerges naturally. It goes beyond mere structure as universal.

These four aspects of contextualization reside within the simultaneity of experience. The four aspects of “The Experiencing Who,” *what-when-where-how* maintain an open description. For Rollo May:

The phenomenologists hold that we must cut through the tendency in the West to believe we understand things if we only know their causes, and to find out and describe instead what the thing is as a phenomenon—the experience, as it is given to us, in its “givenness.” First, that is, we must know what we are talking about. This is not to rule out causation and genetic development, but rather to say that the question of *why* one is what one is does not have meaning until we know *what* one is.<sup>2</sup>

*What is the experience in its immediate givenness is the question.* This frees the interviewer from the vicious circle of cause and effect. Although why and how are related, the latter maintains the continuity of the experience. Continuity is not cause. How, by what means, displays the ongoingness of experience.

With I.I. the interviewer attends to and explores aspects of the interviewee's experience, as they emerge *in conversation*, pursuing and yet allowing the interviewee to develop the context. The interviewer is involved in listening and speaking when clarification is necessary to avoid possible misunderstandings.

I.I. utilizes a listening/speaking approach. It is a direct source of obtaining the interviewee's lived-experience, that which is given, in expression. I.I. is interpersonal, co-arising from talking-with in which the interviewer obtains *experiential findings* from the interviewee. This means that the interviewer is involved yet is *not in* the experience as the interviewee lives it. The interviewer is *being-with*<sup>3</sup> the interviewee as *ahead-of, alongside, behind*. The *ahead-of* is that the interviewer is *not in* the experience itself, which the interviewee describes, which allows the interviewer to open the experience to question. The *alongside* is that the interviewer *is in* the immediacy of the situation talking-with the interviewee. The *behind* is not only temporal in relation to the experience but it is being supportive in that the interviewer allows the interviewee to unfold the phenomenon. This approach to a universal method goes beyond mere description of the phenomenon. Being-with gives rise to the possibility of discovering-describing-disclosing the phenomenon.

I.I. implies something more than just two persons in a situation. It is being-involved with. That in itself is integral. This allows for changes in the interview as the interviewee gives a description including immediate impressions as they arise. What the interviewee describes is assimilated and accommodated in the lived-experience. Experience shifts one's cognitive life. One of the aspects of description is that it meets the gap in the cognitive. Description not only is a staying-with but displays a shift in experience as it is taken-up and presented.

I.I. resides within the dynamics of dialogue. Questions arise spontaneously as the dialogue opens. The interviewer cannot foresee questions in advance due to the nature of the interview itself. Since relationships are reciprocal but not necessarily symmetrical<sup>4</sup> clarification is ongoing. The interviewee has assimilated and accommodated experiences. The interviewer utilizes identity and variation<sup>5</sup> to clarify the meaning of the experience. This involves a risk:

The existential risk is always present as one comes toward another since the basic modal presence in relationships is reciprocal but not necessarily symmetrical. If relationships were symmetrical we would have nothing to say because without the possibility of variation in speaking everything would be  $A = A$ .<sup>6</sup>

Dialogue demands, says Langan, our contribution to the encounter.<sup>7</sup>

Dialogue, says Janusz Kuczynski, can be a process of understanding the dialectics of identity, differences and oppositions.<sup>8</sup> Assimilation (incorporate) and accommodation (modify) are likened to *identity* and *variation*.<sup>9</sup> This allows for the possibility of clarity and in this way the interviewee and interviewer are *co-searching* the phenomenon itself. For Stephan Strasser:

The dialogue is the most primeval phenomenon, generally and necessarily experienced everywhere; this is its title to priority. Objectivity is deducted from it; that is its limitation.<sup>10</sup>

Interviewing can be standardized or informal and flexible. This approach is flexible. Although a given time is set aside for each interview the phenomenon itself should be the guide as to how many interviews and how long each should be. Usually by the third interview many redundancies are found. Also it is not so much the length of time of the interview it is the seriousness of the attempt of the communication itself.

The choice of the interview location is given to the interviewee to allow for a comfortable surrounding. Interviewee's usually opt for privately held interviews. This is probably the most efficient setting as it provides the possibility of one's attention without rushing through the interview. Interviews can be recorded only after obtaining permission from the interviewee. Also notes taken should be in the presence of the interviewee in clear view for review and approval. If the interviewer chooses to take notes, before the interviewee begins talking, general questions should be asked such as name, address and occupation. When the interviewer finishes writing this down it should be shown to the interviewee to ask if it is correct. Even the correct spelling of a person's name means a lot to "The Experiencing Who."

Following that final interview, the written piece of work by the interviewer is given to the interviewee for review and approval. This allows for the possibility of a synthesis, gathering the *experiential findings* of thoughts, questions, correctives and elaborations, into a unitary whole.

#### Notes

- 1) Thomas Langan, *Self-Discovery* (San Francisco: Golden Phoenix Press, 1985), p. 22.
- 2) Rollo May, *Psychology and the Human Dilemma* (Princeton: D. Van Norstrand Co., Inc., 1967), p. 88.
- 3) James W. Kidd, "Universalism as Being-with: Caring-itself", *Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium of Universalism*

- (Berlin 1990). *The Teilhard Review and Journal of Cosmic Convergence*, 26, no. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 27-29.
- 4) Stephan Strasser, *Dialogal Phenomenology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 56.
  - 5) Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich: Argo Books, 1970), p. 49.
  - 6) James W. Kidd, "Dialogal Modes of Universalism", *Proceedings of the 1st International Symposium of Universalism* (Warsaw 1989). *Dialectics and Humanism*, XVII, no. 3 (1990), p. 112.
  - 7) Thomas Langan, "Searching in History for the Sense of It All", *The Review of Metaphysics*, XXXII, no. 1 (September 1978), p. 43.
  - 8) Janusz Kuczynski, *Dialogue and Universalism as a New Way of Thinking* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 1989), p. 414.
  - 9) The Writing Caruso, "Hermeneutic Discourse: If I understand I understand it beyond the given; If I understand I give variations to it; If I understand that which is spoken I can speak it in my own."
  - 10) Stephan Strasser, "Phenomenologies and Psychologies", *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, V, no. 1 (Winter 1965), p. 104.

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