

Research on Literary Education from the Hermeneutic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Research on literary education from the hermeneutic perspective is based on hermeneutic theory and aims to provide new viewpoints, new ideas, and new methods for literary education. Hermeneutics is a systematic theory studying the understanding and interpretation of works. This research generally involves theoretical issues such as "Basic Principles," "dominant techniques," and "applied Engineering," which are directly related to the effectiveness and success of literary education.

KEYWORDS

Hermeneutics; Literary Education; Basic Principles; Dominant Techniques; Applied Engineering

Hermeneutics originates from the term "Hermes" and can also be translated as interpretive studies, exegesis, commentary, or semantics. It refers to a discipline that provides methodologies for understanding history, works, laws, and existence in various humanities disciplines such as historiography, literary criticism, jurisprudence, and philosophy.

^{[1] (P7)} Research on literary education from the hermeneutic perspective is based on hermeneutic theory and aims to offer new viewpoints, new ideas, and new methods for literary education. Based on this, the author will discuss the theoretical issues involved in "basic principles," "dominant techniques," and "applied engineering" in research on literary education from the hermeneutic perspective separately:

1 Research on Literary Education from the Hermeneutic Perspective Should Emphasize the Exploration of "Basic Principles"

Research on literary education from the hermeneutic perspective must first focus on the exploration of "basic principles." Hermeneutics is a philosophy and systematic theory concerning the understanding and interpretation of works. It "regards the ontology of interpretation as the aesthetic generation process of the 'work's' meaning, treating the reader's interpretation as an activity of seeking understanding and self-understanding, that is, constructing both the 'work's' meaning and the self-world."^{[2] (P2)} Different views have emerged regarding how to approach works in research on literary education from the hermeneutic perspective. The following briefly elaborates on its "basic principles":

(1) Traditional Hermeneutics Represented by Friedrich Schleiermacher

Traditional hermeneutics (epistemological hermeneutics) holds that when understanding a work, the interpreter can transcend temporal and spatial distances to restore the pre-existing, inherent, and unchanging meaning of the work as well as the author's mood, expression, and state, thereby obtaining the "original meaning" of the work. This achieves the reconstruction and replication of the spiritual world of both the author and the work, known as the "restoration theory." The German Romantic religious philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher believed that "every word, every sentence, every expression or pleasantries, every piece of art, and every historical act can be understood by people precisely because there is a commonality."^{[3] (P146-147)} In his view, understanding means that the interpreter, starting from documents, works, or records of actions as historical content, through intuition or empathy, imaginatively places themselves in the author's position and environment, enters the author's personality, and grasps the author's intentions, emotions, and ideas, thereby better understanding the original meaning of the work.^{[4] (P93-109)}

(2) Modern Hermeneutics Represented by Martin Heidegger

Modern hermeneutics (ontological hermeneutics) advocates that understanding a work is not a simple "restoration" of meaning, but a continuous creation and generation of meanings related to history, the work, tradition, etc., thereby constantly obtaining "innovative meanings." This process realizes the creation and generation of the horizons of the interpreter and the author through mutual exchange, which is known as the "theory of creation." The German philosopher and founder of existential philosophy, Martin Heidegger, pointed out that the phenomenon of understanding pervades all relationships between humans and the world, and the process of understanding occurs in all aspects of human life, that is, the meaning of the entire world. This does not mean that the meaning of the entire world appears to the interpreter only after being understood; nor does it mean that understanding discovers meanings that have long existed somewhere, but rather that meanings are "generated" as understanding unfolds.^{[5] (pp.144-150)} The famous German philosopher and master of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, also stated that hermeneutics is not a methodology

[6] (pp. 53-56), but an infinite dialogical activity centered on questions, and this dialogical activity is an effective way for the horizons of the interpreter and the author of the work to continuously fuse. Some scholars, when discussing modern hermeneutics represented by Heidegger, have said: "The meaning of the object of understanding depends on the interpreter... The object of understanding does not have a fixed and unchanging meaning; it can continuously generate new meanings depending on the interpreter... As history progresses, new interpreters emerge, and new meanings of the object of understanding also appear... The meaning of the object of understanding is always unfinished, and it is impossible to arrive at an essential meaning." [7] (pp. 54-60)

(3) Contemporary Hermeneutics Represented by Paul Ricoeur

Contemporary hermeneutics (phenomenological hermeneutics) holds that understanding a work is formed through reflection on the traditional hermeneutic "restoration theory" and the modern hermeneutic "creation theory." An important representative of contemporary hermeneutics—the French philosophical master Paul Ricoeur—advocates integrating hermeneutics, which shares a common horizon ("the problem of meaning") and common themes ("the origin of meaning precedes language"), with phenomenology, thereby making phenomenological methods an important reference for hermeneutic methods to understand the "hidden meanings" of works. This is known as the "theory of reflection." In his view, "reflection" is a form of critique, "an important link between understanding the 'work' as a symbol and self-understanding, with self-understanding being the ultimate goal of hermeneutics." [8] (pp. 75-81) Therefore, he believes that "the purpose of interpretation is to interpret hidden meanings within explicit meanings, to unfold the layers of meaning implicit in the text." [9] (p. 247) Only through "reflection" on metaphors and meanings, thereby transcendentally understanding the ontology of the world and the existence of the "self" (ego), can one reach the ontological roots of understanding.

2 Research on Literary Education from the Hermeneutic Perspective Should Emphasize the Exploration of "Dominant Techniques"

Research on literary education from the hermeneutic perspective should also emphasize the exploration of "dominant techniques." Literary education, influenced by hermeneutic theories such as the "restoration theory," "creation theory," and "reflection theory," faces hermeneutic dilemmas in the interpretation of works. The following provides a detailed explanation of these "dominant techniques":

(1) The "Restoration Theory" of Work Interpretation Represented by Friedrich Schleiermacher

From its origins to the period of Friedrich Schleiermacher, hermeneutics—whether as a technique or method, or as an epistemology or methodology—aimed at interpreting works to obtain the meanings of truth, goodness, and beauty contained within them. The reader's interpretation of a work is a form of "re-experience," and therefore the reader must discard their own "preconceptions," "prejudices," and "pre-understandings," entering the work with a blank state to reproduce and reconstruct the original intent of the work. This is the "restoration theory" of work interpretation.

(2) The "Creation Theory" of Work Interpretation Represented by Martin Heidegger

In the 20th century, hermeneutics shifted from traditional epistemological or methodological research to ontological research in modern hermeneutics. According to Heidegger, understanding is not a mode of behavior of "Dasein" (being-there), but rather the mode of existence of Dasein itself. Gadamer explicitly pointed out that "the meaning of the 'work' transcends its author; this is not merely temporary but eternal. Therefore, understanding is not merely an act of reproduction but always an act of creation." [10] (p. 380) This is the "creation theory" of work interpretation.

(3) The "Reflection Theory" of Work Interpretation Represented by Paul Ricoeur

As a leading figure of phenomenological hermeneutics—the contemporary French philosopher Paul Ricoeur stated: "The task of hermeneutics is to reconstruct all kinds of activities through which the 'work' emerges from the dim background of life experiences, practical actions, and painful experiences, being given by the author to the reader, who then accepts the 'work' and thereby changes their practical actions." [11] (p. 86) This is the "reflective theory" of interpreting works.

3 The Study of Literary Education from the Hermeneutic Perspective Should Emphasize the Exploration of "Applied Engineering"

The study of literary education from the hermeneutic perspective must once again emphasize the exploration of "applied engineering." In other words, this research must center on the interpretation of works and make it one of the main directions and theoretical foundations for reforms in literary curricula, literary teaching materials, and literary instruction. The following provides a detailed explanation of this "applied engineering":

(1) "Interpretation" is the Process of the "Hermeneutic Circle" between Teachers, Students, and the Work

In literary education, the interpretive activity of teachers and students is the process of the "hermeneutic circle" with the work. Schleiermacher believed that the "hermeneutic circle" is the cyclical movement of understanding moving back and forth along the work, disappearing only when the work is fully comprehended. Dilthey developed the concept further, arguing that it should include three interdependent relationships: the relationship between individual words and the whole work; the relationship between the work itself and the author's psychological state; and the relationship between the work and its genre and type. Heidegger expanded the understanding of the "hermeneutic circle," asserting that the understanding of an unknown work is always determined by "pre-understanding," "fore-sight," and "pre-grasp," and that complete understanding is not the elimination of the circle between whole and part, but the fullest realization of this circle. Gadamer inherited Heidegger's view, holding that the "hermeneutic circle" is not a methodological cycle but describes an ontological structural factor in understanding; thus, his interpretation of works is a continuous process moving from whole to part and back from part to whole.

(2) "Interpretation" is the Process of "Fusion of Horizons" between Teachers, Students, and the Work's Author

In literary education, the interpretive activity of teachers and students is the process of "fusion of horizons" with the work's author. The hermeneutic concept of "fusion of horizons" is not a form of "compromise," but a dialectic of openness and limitation, of preserving differences and seeking commonality; it is not a singular, static, or one-sided way of thinking, but a dynamic inclusiveness of multicultural and multidimensional thought. Gadamer stated that "the historical movement of human Dasein lies in that it has no absolute point of reference, and therefore it never possesses a truly closed horizon."^{[10] (p.391)} This indicates that the horizons of teachers, students, and the work's author are not fixed but can continuously change, representing a unity of the infinite and the finite.

(3) "Interpretation" is the Process of "Meaning Construction" of the Work by Teachers and Students

In literary education, the interpretive activity of teachers and students is the process of "meaning construction" of the work. Heidegger believed that interpreting a work is not a subjective activity of the reader but a mode of the reader's existence. Gadamer further defined it from the relationship between interpretation and the work as "the truly given thing to be understood."^{[12] (p.59)} Therefore, "education should not be limited to fixed content that must be absorbed but should be regarded as a human process in which individuals learn through various experiences how to express themselves, how to communicate with others, how to explore the world, and how to continuously—throughout their entire lives—perfect themselves."^{[13] (p.180)}

(4) "Interpretation" is the Process of "Spiritual Encounter" between Teachers, Students, and the Work's Author

In literary education, the interpretive activity of teachers and students is the process of a "spiritual encounter" with the work's author. The hermeneutic view of the work holds that when a work has not yet encountered the conditions that allow it to manifest, it is like a dormant life that requires a force to awaken it; this awakener is the reader who encounters it, and only through the reader's participation can its true manifestation begin. Therefore, Gadamer reminds us not to overlook the "contingency of the conditions of possibility" for the work's manifestation.^{[10] (p.150)} In other words, a work cannot and will not manifest itself spontaneously; its contingent manifestation requires "conditions of possibility," meaning its existence can only be realized when other conditions are present, the most important of which are the "collision of thoughts," "spiritual communication," and "spiritual encounter" between the reader and the work's author.

In conclusion, the author has discussed the "fundamental principles" of literary education research within the hermeneutic perspectives represented by Friedrich Schleiermacher's traditional hermeneutics (epistemological hermeneutics), Martin Heidegger's modern hermeneutics (ontological hermeneutics), and Hans-Georg Gadamer's contemporary hermeneutics (phenomenological hermeneutics). Furthermore, the "dominant techniques" of literary education research in these hermeneutic perspectives—such as Schleiermacher's "reproduction theory" of text interpretation, Heidegger's "creation theory," and Ricoeur's "reflection theory"—as well as the "interpretation" process involving the teacher and student's "hermeneutic circle" with the work, the "fusion of horizons" with the author, the "construction of meaning" of the work, and the "spiritual encounter" with the author, which constitute the "applied engineering" aspects of literary education research within hermeneutics, have been elaborated upon. This sufficiently demonstrates that literary education research from the hermeneutic perspective is a vital issue that deeply influences the life of literary education and is directly related to its effectiveness and success or failure.

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