

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 123 381

CE 007 117

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 TITLE Literary Life-Cycle Research as an Atypical Research Modality for Adult Education.
 PUB DATE Apr 76
 NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Adult Education Research Conference (Toronto, Ontario, April 8, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Adult Development; *Adult Education; *Characterization (Literature); Content Analysis; Human Development; *Literary Analysis; Literature; *Research Methodology; Research Needs
 IDENTIFIERS Life Cycle Research

ABSTRACT

Literary analysis is approached as an atypical research modality: a modality that falls outside the parameters of experimental research usually described in the literature of educational meta-research. It is maintained that atypical research is appropriate as ancillary and complementary to typical research. Following Guba's explication of "experimental" research, six characteristics of literary analysis (applied to literary life-cycle research) are identified. Literary life-cycle research which is used by the researcher to describe the life cycle in terms of information gathered from literary works; (1) is complementary to conventional empirical research, (2) is comparative, (3) is explicative, (4) is interpretive, (5) is disciplined, and (6) can be viewed as a form of case history research. A procedural model for literary analysis is presented. The model is illustrated with an example of how analysis of literature discloses knowledge about the nuances of the so-called mid-life crisis. It is concluded that literary analysis has the potential for generating knowledge about human development and the phases of adult development, and that this knowledge is highly valuable for the practitioner of adult education. An 18-item bibliography is included. (Author/MS)

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Literary Life-Cycle Research as an Atypical
Research Modality for Adult Education

Adult Education Research Conference

Toronto, Canada

April 8, 1976

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One of the assumptions under which I operate as an adult educator is this: All things being equal, it is likely that I shall be increasingly effective as an adult educator as I become progressively knowledgeable about adult development as it is related to learning. This assumption presents itself to me as a fundamental principle, not beyond dispute and out of the reach of further examination (because all things are never equal), but certainly beyond discussion for present purposes.

The assumption functions as a justification or rationale for studying various models of human development in terms of implications for adult education. In one of my graduate seminars in adult education at Indiana University a number of developmental models and concepts are studied, including the works of Buhler (1), Havighurst (6), Kohlberg (14), Houle (10), Erikson (3), Gould (4), Vaillant (18), and Levinson (15).

I have a particular fondness for the research of Levinson and his associates. A note appended to their article "The Psycho-social Development of Men in Early Adulthood and the Mid-Life Transition," reads as follows:

There are excellent biographies and autobiographies of persons such as Sigmund Freud, Eugene O'Neill, Bertrand Russell, Henry James, James Joyce, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. There are also novels and plays about men in the mid-life transition, often written by men during or just following their own mid-life transition -- for example, The Iceman Cometh (O'Neill), Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (Albee), The Tempest (Shakespeare), The Man Who Cried I Am (Williams), Chimera (Barth), and Herzog (Bellow). Works of this kind are of great value, both in forming a theory of adult development and in testing and extending our present theory.

Quite independently of the observation of the Levinson team of researchers, I had formulated the hypothesis that researchers could obtain many insights into adult development through the analysis of literary works. Thus, my admiration for the Levinson observation! One is always respectful

of a scholarly work that supports one's halting attempts to formulate a meta-research proposal. I presented my proposal in a published form last year (16). My central thesis was that analysis of Bildungsroman literature -- a literary portrait of the development of a fictional character -- can represent an authentic research modality for adult educators. The literary artist, I suggest, offers a model of human development based on his experience and exceptional perceptions of life; the author of a novel that falls under the Bildungsroman genre presents to us a theory or model of human development "embedded" in the novel. I contended further that analysis of literature as a research modality for adult education must be founded on principles of inquiry that are systematic in order to remove the inquiry from the realm of mere cursory examination.

It is my intention to explore literary life-cycle research further in this paper. Literary life-cycle research is called "literary" because the data collected by the researcher are to be found in literary works; it is called "life-cycle" research because the intent of the researcher is to describe the life cycle, or some aspect of the life cycle, in terms of information garnered from literary works. My exploration of literary life-cycle research will progress in two ways: 1) through a delineation of some of the characteristics of this type of research and 2) through the development of a basic paradigm which identifies some important steps in undertaking the research.

Some Characteristics of Literary Life-Cycle Research

1. Literary life-cycle research is complementary to conventional empirical research.

In recent years research into adult development has been conducted with rigor and system; it has been most fruitful. There was a time when research

in developmental psychology abruptly stopped after a discussion of adolescence; this time has passed. Fundamental research in terms of model building or theory construction is represented, for example, by Erikson's eight-stage schema of human development; other researchers have generated inferences about adult development from empirical data.

It is not proposed that the literary life-cycle research modality displace conventional modalities. (Although it is not beyond argument that this approach to research could stand by itself as a source of valid descriptions of reality). Literary life-cycle research, as I view it, attempts to "fill in" the subtle nuances of human development, or an aspect of human development, generally overlooked by conventional research. If I wish to discover in finer detail, for example, the feeling reactions of someone who is negotiating the mid-life crisis, I may analyse the character of Bob Slocum in Heller's Something Happened. The fruit of such an analysis, valuable in itself, takes on additional valence when it is compared to findings which have been developed as a result of conventional types of research.

2. Literary life-cycle research is comparative.

The second characteristic of literary life-cycle research is related to the first: literary life-cycle research is essentially comparative. The conclusions reached through literary life-cycle research should be compared to conclusions reached through conventional research modalities to ascertain and explain the congruencies and/or discrepancies that exist between the conclusions.

Comparative analysis may also be undertaken with regard to several different literary works. In such a case the investigator will attempt to

detect patterns common to all of the works studied, or if no patterns emerge, he will try to explain why. Patterns of human development discovered in novels must be compared, it seems to me, to patterns of development disclosed through conventional research procedures. Such a comparison will assure that the literary analysis is anchored to empirical reality. It will also serve to qualify and enrich conclusions based on strictly empirical studies.

Literary life-cycle research may be comparative, therefore, in two senses: different literary works can be compared and/or literary works can be compared to findings which result from conventional studies.

3. Literary life-cycle research is explicative.

In literary life-cycle research the inquiry is directed to the explication of elements relating to human development that are implicit in the literary work. I noted previously that the literary artist has something to say about human development or an aspect of human development. Very often the artist speaks in the language of poetic symbol. Stephen Daedalus, in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man experiences a crucial moment in his life when he finds himself, for the first time, in the city's red light district. Here is Joyce's description of the event:

He had wandered into a maze of narrow and dirty streets. From the foul laneways he heard bursts of hoarse riot and wrangling and the drawling of drunken singers. He walked onward, undismayed, wondering whether he had strayed into the quarters of the jews. Women and girls dressed in long vivid gowns traversed the street from house to house. They were leisurely and perfumed. A trembling seized him and his eyes grew dim. The yellow gasflames arose before his troubled vision against the vapoury sky, burning as if before an altar. Before the doors and in the lighted halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some rite. He was in another world; he had awakened from a slumber of centuries (13).

The event represents a threshold in Stephen's development. But how describe the event in the more precise and prosaic terms of life-cycle research? Is the event a rite de passage? Perhaps. The literary life-cycle researcher is called upon to translate the symbolic expression of the artist's poetic intuition into more discursive terms. The language of poetic symbol must be translated into the language code of logical discourse. Literary symbols, replete with meanings, must be explicated.

4. Literary life-cycle research is interpretive.

In order to explicate the meanings contained in literary works the researcher must interpret the literary works. The interpretive process in literary analysis has traditionally been freewheeling, loosely structured, and dependent upon the cultivated criticalness of the analyst. The chief devices of critical interpretation, according to Hillway (9), "... are perspicacity, experience, and logic."

Critical interpretation means that the researcher must not simply offer highly imaginative constructions of meaning that are unfounded, or conceptual fabrications that are unsupported by evidence. It would be all too easy, for example, to interpret the development of Stephen Daedalus in such a way that the first five of Erikson's stages of development are "discovered." Such an interpretation, however, would be tendentious in a way that contradicts the spirit of honest inquiry. The act of interpretation is an act of judgment founded on evidentiary warrants and a concern for rationality. And this leads us to a consideration of the next characteristic of literary life-cycle research.

5. Literary life-cycle research is disciplined.

In discussing the differences between experimental and what he calls "aexperimental" research, Guba (5) stated that aexperimental methods "... are not simply poor patched-up imitations of 'real research.'" While literary life-cycle research is freewheeling, it is not sloppy; while it is loosely structured, it is not formless and devoid of consistency or system. Literary life-cycle research is, ideally, disciplined in the sense used by Cronbach and Suppes when they wrote:

A disciplined inquiry does have an internal consistency that requires colleagues to take the findings seriously, even when they disagree with them. A scholarly report is considerably more than a printout of speculations, preconceptions, and wish-fulfilling observations. It nourishes thought. Indeed, the fact that it invites and rewards close examination is the mark of worthy inquiry. The detail of the argument, whether it is describing methods of data collection or the derivation of practical recommendations, is lucid, specific, and pertinent...But far more fundamental to disciplined inquiry is its central attitude, which places a premium on objectivity and evidential test (2).

In literary life-cycle research the literary work is the repository of data. The investigator seeks out these data and allows the work to speak for itself; he does not impose his predispositions upon the work. He guards against selective perception and biased inferences. In short, he is prepared to offer reasons and arguments for his explications and interpretations of the text; he is prepared to investigate the literary work in a systematic, orderly, and open manner.

6. Literary life-cycle research can be viewed as a form of case history research.

A novel (or any work of art) is an expression of the vision of the artist. A literary work is the mediative instrument which conveys to us the author's insights and experiences. When the novel concerns the development of a fictional character or some aspect of the character's development, the author is telling us something about human development as he sees it. He is presenting to us a case history. The subject of the case history is fictional, but the fictional existence of the character is grounded in the real existence of the artist. Indeed, in many instances fictional characters are the real characters of the novelists fictionalized, e.g., James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus. In the case of biographies, of course, the subject of the biography is real.

Isaac and Michael (11) observe that case studies are "... in-depth investigations of a given social unit resulting in a well-organized picture of that unit." A social unit, according to Isaac and Michael, may be an individual, group, institution, or community. They offer an example of case study research: the study of a student on probation by a social worker. May it not also be said that a study of a fictional character or a subject of a biography by a literary life-cycle researcher represents a species of case study? I think so.

Literary life-cycle research, no doubt, manifests many more characteristics than those addressed in the paper. Precisely what these characteristics are remains to be seen. The properties peculiar to this research will not appear with any degree of clarity until the research is actually undertaken. After that we may observe the research process and product more carefully and be able to identify further attributes. It is now time, however, to move on to the second part of this paper:

a consideration of some important steps in the literary life-cycle research process.

Basic Paradigm for Literary Life-Cycle Research

If I were to engage in literary life-cycle research in a formal way, I would probably follow some kind of procedural paradigm. Until I actually conduct such research, however, any paradigm I construct is open to further testing and refinement. (It will be remembered, I hope, that this paper is essentially an epistemological exploration. Such an exploration cannot be expected to yield results that are more than tentative. I say this not by way of apology, but by way of calling attention to the general thrust of the paper).

1. Specify the arena of life-cycle research.

My first endeavor is to focus on the life-cycle in a precise manner. Do I wish to study the total life-cycle? Then I must necessarily turn to biographies, autobiographies, diaries, or Bildungsroman novels. Perhaps I wish to look at the meaning of being old in our culture. I will then turn to literary works that concern the issue of aging. Suppose, however, that I want to learn something more about the mid-life crisis -- that time in the adult's life when, according to Jacques (12) death ceases to be a "... general conception, or an event experienced in terms of the loss of someone else, (and) becomes a personal matter, one's own death, one's own real and actual mortality." The mid-life crisis is described in fuller detail by Novak (17) as "the experience of nothingness" and by Heidegger (7) as the moment when a person realizes that his very being is Sein zum Tode -- being-toward-death. I propose, for the sake of example, to select the

mid-life crisis as my arena of study.

2. State Criteria for the Selection of Literary Materials.

One does not select literary materials for analysis on the basis of mere whim. It seems to me that certain canons or rules must be followed in the process of determining what materials can be exploited. I suggest at least four canons that must be taken into consideration in selecting literary materials: 1) the literary canon, 2) the canon of sufficiency, 3) the canon of relevance, and 4) the canon of clarity.

The literary canon advises that whatever I select as the object of my analysis must indeed qualify as literature. There is a difference, after all, between Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and the banal and superficial paperback romances that one may purchase at the grocery store. Shakespeare was able to deal with themes in such a way that what he wrote has universal and transcendent appeal. Authentic literature speaks across time barriers and across cultures. The literary materials selected for research should be recognized as literature or at least as possessing some minimal literary quality. These materials should convey the texture of reality in an artful and insightful way.

The canon of sufficiency rules that a literary work must provide an adequate quantity of information about the character under study. A biography that is little more than a chronicle -- a listing of the public events in the life of the subject -- would hardly be appropriate for an analysis that attempts to explicate and interpret developmental psychological data. A literary work must provide a sufficient basis for the inferences that will be made later. Inferences and generalizations about the subject in the literary work must rest on sufficient evidence from the text. Precisely

what constitutes a "sufficient" basis for inference is another question. No quantitative rule is in force.

The canon of relevance maintains that the literary work must correspond substantially with the life-cycle theme or with some definite aspects of the life-cycle. It would be a frivolous waste of time to analyse a literary work that bears no relation to developmental psychology.

Finally, the canon of clarity requires that the literary work is not so dominated by complex symbolism as to render decipherment in terms of developmental psychology unduly laborious. The literary life-cycle researcher who attempts to analyse works that are fraught with enigma and ambiguity lays himself open to tremendous frustrations.

In delineating four canons for the selection of literary materials I do not suppose that I have enumerated all such canons or even the best criteria. The point I am trying to make, however, is that the researcher must lay out a rationale for the selection process -- some reasoned foundation which disposes one to maintain the probability that the materials selected will afford the researcher with information.

In researching the mid-life crisis I shall require a literary work or works that meet the requirements of the four canons I have listed.

3. Select Literary Materials.

A veritable library of literary materials awaits the researcher even after he has screened thousands of titles through the application of the canons of literature, sufficiency, relevance, and clarity. His choice of materials will ordinarily be guided by his literary interests and enthusiasms.

For the sake of our example, let it be given that I have selected Heller's Something Happened (8) as the object of my analysis. Arguments could be offered, I am sure, to support the thesis that this novel meets the requirements of the four canons.

4. Analyse Literary Materials.

In the analysis of the literary materials the investigator must direct attention to predominant themes, prevailing symbols, and recurring motifs in the text. Essentially a literary analysis of this kind is conducted from the standpoint of an educator who is interested in developmental psychology. Such an analysis is difficult since its spirit is interdisciplinary; the investigator must have competencies in literary analysis, education, and developmental psychology.

As a result of my analysis of the character of Bob Slocum in Something Happened, I should be able to elaborate a view of the mid-life crisis in a detail that is sometimes lacking in conventional studies. I should be able to limn such a portrait with a high degree of particularity, privy as I am to the vie interieure of Slocum.

For the sake of our example, suppose I discover Slocum in the grips of a free-floating anxiety of fear, an anxiety or fear related directly to his experience of the mid-life crisis. This fear affects his relationships with the members of his family and with persons in the on-the-job situation. (That such a conclusion can be adduced from an analysis of the novel is beyond the scope of my present comments. I suggest, however, that my argument is solid).

5. Compare the Analysis Product with other Research Findings.

I stated earlier that literary life-cycle research is essentially comparative. The literary life-cycle researcher is called upon to measure the conclusions of his literary analysis against the inferences made by other researchers employing conventional research modalities.

To follow our example: Let us suppose that I find innumerable congruencies between Levinson's research on the mid-life crisis and the characterization of Slocum in Something Happened. To a degree both my research conclusions and Levinson's are mutually substantiating. But in the end, my study has expanded Levinson's, and for a simple reason. In studying the fictional character of Slocum, I have, as it were, climbed into his skin. My insights about the mid-life crisis are much more real; I have grasped to some extent the drama of the mid-life crisis and have shared with Slocum his existential anguish.

6. Relate Findings to the Practice of Adult Education.

Research, I think, should be fruitful. Research should have some impact on the theory of adult education. And since I see adult education largely as a social practice discipline, I would like to think that literary life-cycle research should hold meanings for practice.

To carry through on the example I have chosen, I can see the applicability of my research findings vis-a-vis the character of Bob Slocum to business education and to family life education. As a consequence of my research into Heller's Something Happened I may be able to delineate some guidelines for education that take into consideration the mid-life crisis as a major factor for the breakdown of communications at work and in the home. I may be able to

recommend educational treatments for adults experiencing the mid-life crisis; I may reach some further understanding of the adult who is negotiating the mid-life crisis and this understanding may assist me in becoming, if nothing else, a more compassionate and sympathetic teacher.

Conclusion

My presentation of literary life-cycle research admittedly has been sketchy. The main contours of this atypical research mode have been broadly delineated to the end that I may receive some feedback. I have already obtained valuable feedback from students in my graduate seminars. It is my hope that I may add your observations and critiques to theirs. The development of what is essentially a multidisciplinary approach to research is a task that can be completed only in the event that many persons are involved in the task. I welcome your comments.

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