Japan Bilingual Publishing Co.

Philosophy and Realistic Reflection

https://ojs.bilpub.com/index.php/prr

ARTICLE

What Might Gadamer and Confucius Say About Educational Research? Towards a Better Understanding

Ying Ma

Department of Educational Studies, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey, BC V3W 2M8, Canada

ABSTRACT

This paper challenges the dominance of tacit empiricism in educational research by drawing on Gadamerian hermeneutics and Confucian modes of interpretation. Rather than grounding inquiry solely in measurable outcomes or predetermined procedures, the paper argues for cultivating historical and philosophical awareness as foundational to understanding educational experience. Through a commitment to methodological dynamism, it highlights how research can unfold through a dialogical movement that rejects prefabricated templates and resists the rigidity of linear empirical models. The paper further advocates for recognizing the multiplicity of embodied, relational, and moral truths that emerge across diverse contexts. Such truths cannot be fully captured by narrow empirical frames. They require modes of inquiry that intertwine understanding and acting, and that honor the unpredictable and evolving character of educational life. By integrating empirical resources with philosophical depth rather than positioning them in opposition, the paper proposes a more generous and expansive orientation to inquiry. Ultimately, the paper calls for reconsidering dominant research paradigms and disrupting entrenched dichotomies between the empirical and the conceptual. It calls for a more holistic, context attentive, and ethically informed approach to educational research, one that understands inquiry as an ongoing interpretive journey rather than a process of determining fixed truths.

Keywords: Gadamerian Hermeneutics; Confucian Interpretation; Tacit Empiricism; Philosophical Inquiry; Methodological Dynamism

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Ying Ma, Department of Educational Studies, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey, BC V3W 2M8, Canada; Email: ying.ma2@kpu.ca

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18 November 2025 | Revised: 12 March 2026 | Accepted: 26 March 2026 | Published Online: 28 May 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55121/prr.v3i2.964

CITATION

Ma, Y., 2026. What Might Gadamer and Confucius Say About Educational Research? Towards a Better Understanding. Philosophy and Realistic Reflection. 3(2): 14–29. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55121/prr.v3i2.964

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2026 by the author(s). Published by Japan Bilingual Publishing Co. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0).

1. Introduction

The word research is derived from the Middle French "recherche", which means "to go about seeking". Its Latin root "circare" means "go about, wander, traverse". Though as a noun, research implies a dynamic process of seeking, wandering, and traversing. This dynamic process is oriented toward better understanding. Indeed, pursuing "better" understandings has always been an assiduous human endeavour in the realm of research and beyond. However, much of the discourse surrounding research in education presents a false dichotomy of discourses between empirical and conceptual/philosophical, or "applied" and "pure" (Stokes, cited by Farnsworth and Solomon, p. 1)[1]. Farnsworth and Solomon[1] capture the dichotomy:

> One result of this discourse is that those who advocate a 'what works' approach as seen as 'pragmatists', while theorists' are positioned in opposition to this practical stance as those who pontificate about ideas but do not have much to say about what a teacher should do on Monday morning. (p. 1)

Though seeking better understanding is the common purpose of research, what counts as better understanding diverges, highlighted in the binary discourses about "what works"[2] in empirical/practical-oriented research and "messy floating ideas" in philosophical/conceptual inquiries. "What works"[2] approach to research, characterized by procedures of frameworks, templates, methodology and methods, data collection, has gained overwhelmingly dominant attention in the educational field compared with its conceptual and philosophical counterparts. Concerns have been raised about "methodolatry": the privileging of methodological concerns over other concerns in research in unreflective ways. Methodolatry is not only widely observed in quantitative research, qualitative researchers are in danger of reifying methods in a similar way[3]. In other words, educational research is largely considered empirical, with spotlighted methodological concerns. On the other end of the spectrum, philosophers of education are not considered good candidates to teach research methodology courses, and those doing conceptual or philosophical inquiry are not considered to be doing research in proper ways. What should you write for your methodological section if you are writing a philosophical paper?

In this paper, I hope to challenge the dominance of empiricism in educational research by drawing on the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Confucius's approaches to understanding, particularly how they reframe educational research towards a better understanding, informed by the interconnectivity between theory and practice, between the abstract and the concrete. This paper, therefore, has the potential to not only challenge the tacit empiricism in current research "what works"[2] discourses, but also offers renewed imaginations for its landscape.

I am aware that the traditions of Gadamerian hermeneutics and Confucian interpretation are rooted in distinct cultural, social and historical traditions. Following Bernstein[4], I believe different wisdom traditions might not be compatible or commensurable, yet they are comparable. Also, drawing on Richard Palmer's[5] comments, "there is no major Western philosopher as close to Confucius's thinking as Gadamer" (p. 81). Palmer[5] further elaborates on their affinities in terms of truth, phronesis, application, tradition, dialogue, etc. In this paper, I echo this comparative lens proposed by Bernstein[4] and Palmer[5], but will go beyond simply comparing and contrasting Gadamerian hermeneutics and Confucian ways of interpretation. In this essay, I will discuss tradition, method, truths and application as interconnected dimensions of understanding. I will focus on Gadamerian and Confucian layered approaches to understanding, and explore how their related perspectives may challenge the predominant emphasis in contemporary educational research on empirical evidence and "what works"[2]. Gadamer's and Confucius' distinctive but aligned approaches to understanding help reframe research as a holistic endeavour: not only about collecting data and analyzing it to explain "what works"[2], but also about asking better questions about our historically constrained situations, going beyond methods and methodologies, being open to a multiplicity of truths and integrating understanding and acting. Their insights can help us challenge empiricism in research and hopefully help us imagine more holistic and integrated ways of "going about seeking" better understandings. What is to be noted here is that the English translations of the Confucian texts are based primarily on Huang[6], Legge[7], and Leys[8], with the author making the final selections, adaptations, and combinations among these translations.

2. Introducing Gadamerian Hermeneutics and Confucian Interpretation

Hermeneutics is etymologically related to Hermes, "cunning, and occasionally violent: a trickster, a robber" (Kermode, p. 1)[9]. According to Chambers[10], Hermes could also refer to "the Greek god charged with translating the words of the gods and goddesses to the mortals, making intelligible that which was not" (p. 228). Understanding the root of the word hermeneutic could unpack some characteristics of the hermeneutic tradition. It is originally about translating from godly words to the mortal world, which is primarily about enabling understanding. Hermes plays a mediating role in the form of language between the mortal and the godly. Hermeneutic understanding inevitably involves the risk of changing, deviating, transforming, adding to or losing some original meanings of godly words in order to be comprehensible to the finite human world. Yet, the impossibility of fully recovering the original meaning of the godly word in Hermes' translation allows for the very space for the newness in understanding. Gadamer[11] suggests: "We can only translate from one language to another if we have understood the meaning of what is said and construct it anew in the medium of the other language" (p. 99). The trickster plays the role of a light-hearted negotiator in-between, playing tricks to bring the viewer into a dynamic and creative interaction with the text. The imaginations about the meanings in the texts are released in the dialogues with the readers. The readers and the texts are in a co-creative relationship through the chaotic and messy processes of interpretation or understanding: "The role of chaos also appears in mythology throughout the world in stories of the trickster, the sacred fool whose antics remind us of the essential role of disorder in the creation or order" (Cajete, p. 17, cited by Chambers, p. 228)[10, 12].

Gallagher[13] classifies four contemporary hermeneutical approaches: "conservative, moderate, radical, and critical hermeneutics" (p. 9). I do not intend to exhaust the interpretative layers of hermeneutics in contemporary scholarship, yet I believe his categorization might provide an overview to understand the differentiated approaches to hermeneutics and better situate Gadamerian hermeneutics amidst the complex and even disputed hermeneutic approaches. According to Gallagher[13], conservative hermeneutics is based on hermeneutical tradition defined by Schleiermacher and Dilthey in the nineteenth century, which aims to break away from one's own historical restraints and reach universal or at least objective truth by following well-defined hermeneutical canons. Moderate hermeneutics primarily refers to Gadamer's and Ricoeur's notions of hermeneutics. Rather than to search for or promise the objective truth, they acknowledge inevitable prejudices and orient around the theme of understanding texts and people better. Radical hermeneutics aims to deconstruct the meaning of a text, not in order to analyze it or to reconstruct a different meaning, but to show that all versions are contingent and relative. Critical hermeneutics is focused on social and individual emancipation from political power and economic exploitation. I believe reaching an understanding or having a better understanding is a distinguishing characteristic of Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Gadamerian hermeneutics helps clarify what counts as a better understanding, which would help us renew the dynamic process of research, challenging the reductive notion of empirical understanding. Being aware of the hermeneutic tradition embedded in Western cultures, I prefer to use the term Confucian interpretation (儒家诠释) instead of Confucian hermeneutics in my investigation. In both similar and different ways from Gadamerian hermeneutics (which I explore in detail in the following sections), Confucian interpretation is also primarily about providing more nuanced accounts of what counts as understanding. I choose the English translation "interpretation" as it encompasses broader connotations in order to contrast rather than subsume or synthesize Confucian approaches to hermeneutic traditions embedded predominantly in Western discourses. I recognize that the historical path of Confucianism could be depicted as a history of "constant interpretation of classics" (Jing, p. 85)[14]. Instead of elaborating interpretation itself as a methodology or approach, the genealogy of Confucianism from pre-Qin classic Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, to contemporary Confucianism embodies its interpretative thoughts and ideas. In the foundational era of Confucianism, Confucius edited, revised, organized, and delivered the six classics. Borrowing Lin Anwu's[15] description: "Confucius deletes the *Book of Poems*, edits the *Book of Rituals and Music*, praises the *Book of Change,* revises *Spring and Autumn Annals*" (p. 155) to enable a better understanding. Neo-

Confucianism is considered to be a revival of Confucianism in China. It originated in the Tang Dynasty, and became prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties. There are two main branches in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism: the Cheng-Zhu branch and the Lu-Wang branch. Zhu Xi, as the representative figure of the Cheng-Zhu branch in the Song dynasty is considered to be the orthodox interpretation of Confucian classics. Cheng-Zhu branch aims at the orthodox understanding of Confucian texts. However, the Lu-Wang branch of neo-Confucianism emphasizes more on human subjectivity in its creative encounters with the classical texts. Contemporary Confucianism is considered to be the second revival following neo-Confucianism. The "Manifesto" for new Confucianism (Zhang et al.)[16] is thought to be in line with the Lu-Wang branch. In my following elaborations of Confucian interpretation, I will primarily draw on the texts of Confucius, Mencius in the period of classical Confucianism, Wang Yangming as representative of the Lu-Wang branch of neo-Confucianism, Mou Zongsan in contemporary Confucianism to highlight some aspects of Confucian interpretative traditions.

3. On Understanding

As discussed above, Gadamerian hermeneutics is oriented around understanding. Risser[17] points out: "The concern of philosophical hermeneutics is with the problematic of understanding. In Truth and Method, (there is) a shift from methodological hermeneutics to philosophical hermeneutics, a shift from understanding as a methodology of the human sciences to the universality of understanding and interpretation" (p. 3). For Gadamer, understanding emerges from relationships—with fusions of horizons between two or several parties in conversation. The encounter with the text or the other is an encounter with another horizon. Horizons do not necessarily merge into oneness. Rather, these horizons co-create an event in which understanding in its newness emerges from the creative and dynamic space in between. As Gadamer[18] comments: "there is always a world already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations, into which experience steps as something new, upsetting itself in the upheaval" (p. 15). Understanding is self-understanding aroused by something that could "address" (Gadamer, p. 299)[19] us and enable us to carry out "the venture into the alien" (Gadamer, p. 15)[18]. I believe the claim that something addresses us implies that interaction with something would disturb, upset, pose questions, transform the original scope of understanding and bring about the newness in the process. We not only understand something better but also have an enriched understanding of our own experience of the world. Our horizon of understanding ourselves as well as others is constantly enlarged and transformed in each encounter that addresses us.

I believe the historical traces of Confucianism primarily reveal and embody the evolving Confucian ways of understanding: from the Confucius' search for moral understanding in the classic texts; neo-Confucian Wang Yangming's emphasis on one's heart in understanding, the unification of understanding and action; Lu Jiuyuan (Song Dynasty)[20]'s claim on "through myself I understand the six classics while six classics help me understand myself" to contemporary Confucian Mou Zongsan's[21, 22] explanation of the purposes and approaches of Confucian understanding.

In the following discussions, I will investigate four aspects of Gadamerian and Confucian approaches to understanding, with special attention paid to their implications for reframing research beyond tacit empiricism. First, understanding for both of them is closely associated with tradition. Their different but closely related attitudes towards tradition would help situate research historically and philosophically. Next, Gadamerian and Confucian approaches to understanding neither have fixed procedures to follow nor the best methods to apply in the scientific sense. Gadamerian to-and-fro movement and the subjective creativity and transcendence in Confucian understanding will challenge the methodology in both quantitative and/or qualitative research. Then, the understanding for both Confucius and Gadamer is not to gain the absolute or universal objective Truth. To pursue for Gadamerian "finite, fallible truth" (Palmer, p. 12)[23] and Confucian ideas of embodied and moral truth (Mou[22]; Huang[24]) would complicate empiricism in research with ethical dimensions and multiplicity of truths. Finally, I will investigate the integrative relationship between understanding and action for Gadamerian and Confucian traditions. For Gadamer[19], understanding involves application in itself. According to neo-Confucian Wang Yangming[25], there is always a unity of understanding and action for Confucius. The unity of application/action and understanding will orient re-

search towards a more holistic end: not merely highlighting practices or theories, but a combination of both. Understanding through the combined lenses of the empirical and the philosophical, the dynamic and intertwined space between the theoretical and the practical needs to be highly encouraged.

4. Lingering Traditions

> *The circle is ... a relation between a living tradition and its interpretation.*
>
> —Risser, 1997, p. 74

While tradition may influence certain aspects of research, such as the historical context or framing of research questions, its role is often secondary to the core principles of empirical research: the scientific method, evidence-based practices, and the pursuit of objective truth usually take precedence, demonstrating that tradition does not play a significant role in shaping the methodologies and outcomes of empirical research. In contrast, tradition plays an essential role in Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding. Tradition, as Risser[17] captures, "constitutes the schema of hermeneutic understanding" (p. 73). Gadamer notes that understanding is inevitably constrained and enabled by tradition. While admitting the constrained and finite horizon in understanding traditions, Gadamer[19] expresses the possible newness in the encounter with traditions: "even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value" (p. 281). On one hand, we understand traditions in our constrained horizons that are already mediated by traditions. On the other hand, understanding could be renewed and generated by encountering the past, the present and the future. Gadamer acknowledges the power of tradition and attempts to, according to Risser[17], "bring it (the tradition) near so that it speaks in a new voice" (p. 100). There are constant dialogic encounters between the tradition and the present, the old and the new in understanding.

Gadamer's hermeneutics does not seek to recover tradition in its original meaning: our understanding of the past and present is constantly mediated by our historicity. Gadamer[19] says, "understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (p. 290). This echoes his previous comment on the relationship between understanding and tradition "hermeneutics is the art of clarifying and mediating by our own effort of interpretation (understanding) what is said by persons we encounter in tradition" (Gadamer, p. 98)[11].

Gadamer (in Palmer, ed.)[23] emphasizes: "we stand in traditions… Tradition is not something which one knows as one's own heritage in such a way that one can accept or reject it." (p. 45). For Gadamer, the factor of tradition is integrative and in constant play in every event of understanding. I believe an analogy of the blood flowing in our veins could be compared to the power of tradition in understanding. We might not be able to tell the chemical compounds in it or what the genes are in it. Yet, we are inevitably linked to our ancestry through it and we are being constantly nourished by it. The traditions are not disappearing into history. Rather, they still and will "bear witness to the lives we are living" (Jardine, p. 2)[26]. The limitations of tradition for Gadamer could be the beginning point of understanding anew: "it is never a mere making-present-again of a past actuality, but a making-present-again as a gather-together-anew" (Risser, p. 100)[17]. There is a strong sense of dialoguing with traditions in light of the new contexts rather than recovery or discovery of something in its originality. Smith[27] also points out: "For Gadamer, tradition is not sclerotic, nostalgic or antiquarian; rather it always opens out into the future to engage what comes to meet it as new" (p. 33).

Confucius emphasizes the significance of understanding the historical roots and historical wisdoms, which can provide valuable insights that may not be adequately captured through empirical observation alone, encouraging a more historically situated approach to research. Like Gadamer, Confucius shows great respect for traditions and greatly upholds the importance of tradition. Yet, he emphasizes more on understanding and appreciating the virtues of certain historical practices compared with Gadamer's argument on the inevitable historicity of understanding. For Confucius, there is a highlight on deliberate learning and recovery of certain practices in traditions. Confucius roots his core thinking in the three epochs Hsia dynasty, Shang dynasty and the Chou dynasty, which represent a normative period for Confucius. Confucius "organizes and inherits ancient Chinese traditions and creates Confucianism in continuity with the valued tradi-

tions" (Jing, p. 87)[14]. Confucius mentions "I transmit but do not create. I have been faithful to and love antiquity. In this I venture to compare myself to our old Peng" (7.1)[6–8]. He also explicitly states that: "The Zhou dynasty models itself upon the two preceding dynasties. What a splendid civilization! I am a follower of Zhou" (3.14)[6–8]. In the age of social upheavals and political disorders, Confucius is reminiscent of Zhou rituals and the value system. It is Confucius' ideal to understand and restore the rituals of the Zhou Dynasty. As Dawson[28] interprets it: "what was of supreme importance in Confucius' eyes was the investigation and transmission of the correct traditions concerning the Golden Age of antiquity" (p. 12).

Confucius introduces the idea that creativity can be embedded in the transmission of traditions itself, challenging the empiricist assumption that creativity is solely associated with novel, groundbreaking ideas. Confucius appears to be a traditionalist or conservatist in preserving traditional values and practices. However, with his deepest sympathy and reverence towards the tradition, Confucius does not follow tradition blindly or rigidly. Despite his argument of transmission instead of creating, Confucius also states: "If by keeping the old warm one can provide an understanding of the new, one is fit to be a teacher" (2.1)[6–8]. Confucius aims by no means rigidly at restoring the originality of Zhou Li. As Dawson[28] observes: "there is a sort of creativity (in Confucius) in using the past to serve the present" (p. 13). The strong connection Confucius builds to antiquity, especially in his reminiscence towards Zhou's rituals and cultures, lies in a creative tension between the present and the ancient, the self and the historical exemplars, rather than total conformity to the traditions. The Analects record Confucius' disapproval of the formality of Zhou's rituals: "In ceremonies, prefer simplicity to lavishness; in funerals, prefer grief to formality" (3.4)[6–8]. Confucius is generally believed to be the editor of the *Classic of Poetry* (Shi Jing), *Book of Documents* (Shu Jing), The *Classic of Rites* (Li), *The Classic of Music* (Yue), *Book of Changes* (Yi Ching), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. Confucius' editing of the six classics does not aim at recovering or passing along whatever historical resources he finds. Otherwise, Confucianism would be reduced to a function of historical reviewing and analysis. Jing[14] reminds us that the breakthrough of Confucianism is manifested in its creative (re)interpretive understanding of the Six Classics. The editing and revising process of historical records or resources is itself a meaning-making process. There is a transition from the nature of witchery history to Confucius' idealization of rituals and music. Confucius's secular argument of "withdrawal of talking about extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings" (7.21)[6–8] is manifested through his editing of the classics. Confucius edits a description in the Spring and Autumn Annals from the previous "meteorite showers return to the sky right before they hit the ground during the night" to "meteorite fall as a big shower at night" (Gong Yang Zhuan, 公羊传) to secularize the extraordinary beings. Lancashire[29] nicely captures the characteristic of the Confucian interpreter as a participant or creator rather than a viewer of tradition: "A Confucianist cannot study these histories merely as objective data, but must view them from the standpoint of a participant. Clearly, then, a genuine Confucian interpretation of history must begin with an analysis of man himself" (p. 82).

Confucius' involvement in tradition could be understood both as deliberate following as well as active and creative participation. As Li Zehou[30] suggests, Confucius infiltrates transmission and creation in his understanding of traditions: "Confucius' attempt to interpret ren through li is his creation. Confucius is always transmitting and creating at the same time" (p. 188). While for Gadamer, understanding is inevitably implicated and enabled by tradition; therefore, there is a sense of receptivity juxtaposed with openness in understanding traditions. Compared with Gadamer's acknowledgement of tradition as limiting and at the same time enabling people, Confucian tradition holds a more active and pragmatic view towards tradition, with the hope of gaining wisdom from tradition and appropriating it to the new context. Or rather, there is a sense of practicality in Confucius' re-creation of tradition: making use of tradition to serve the good of his age. Confucius' learning "does not mean acquiring information as such, but rather absorbing as best as one can insights from tradition- from philosophical texts, documents, songs, manuals on manners and ritual, and the like" (Hansen, p. 23)[31].

Implications for Reframing Research: Being Historically Situated

In the realm of empirical research, the identification and definition of the group or phenomena under study are

typically explicit, yet the historical depth within the empirical "context" often remains limited. Empirical research is characterized by its emphasis on evidence, data, and the scientific method, which prioritizes objective observation and experimentation over adherence to historical practices. A crucial aspect emphasized by both Gadamer and Confucius in their views on tradition is its profound connection to understanding. And history and philosophy are often already intertwined. As Burman[32] suggests: "philosophical assumptions can be presented as part of the context that informed an historical subject" (p. 117). Gadamerian and Confucius' emphases on tradition help reframing and situating empirical research historically and philosophically.

In hermeneutic understandings, tradition unfolds new possibilities and widens the scope of understanding when encountered in today's contexts. Risser's[17] reminder of Gadamer's defence of tradition as an openness to the excluded echoes this sentiment. Similarly, Confucius underscores the practical appropriation of traditions in the present moment, emphasizing that certain values need not be discarded but can be preserved and imbued with new meanings in the contemporary world. Therefore, traditions are not solely to be honoured and followed but can also be actively (re)activated and (re)created, aligning with Confucian practical and creative approaches to their interpretation.

For Confucius, creativity in understanding traditions is paramount. This insight suggests that, as researchers, we can adopt a more historically and philosophically informed approach by reactivating the past in the present, paving the way for a creative and reimagined future by asking better questions with philosophical complexity and depth. This challenges the notion that empirical research exists in a vacuum, advocating for a more holistic perspective that considers the historical evolution of ideas and practices. Also, empiricism often places greater emphasis on breaking away from tradition, viewing it as a potential source of bias. Confucius challenges this perspective by arguing that the creative reactivation of tradition can provide unique insights and enhance the depth of empirical research. Drawing inspiration from Gadamerian hermeneutics and Confucian interpretation, empiricist bias toward solely relying on recent observable data would be disrupted by the depth of historical insights.

Consider a qualitative study on beginning teachers' understandings of classroom authority in culturally diverse schools. Within a conventional empiricist frame, the problem might be formulated as identifying which classroom-management practices are most effective in producing orderly student behaviour. The study design would likely focus on interviews and observations aimed at extracting strategies, comparing responses, and generating practical recommendations. From a Gadamerian-Confucian perspective, however, the problem is formulated differently: how do beginning teachers inherit, reinterpret, and negotiate traditions of authority, respect, and relational responsibility within contemporary classrooms? In this framing, the qualitative study would still use interviews, observations, and reflective journals, but these would be designed not simply to gather data about techniques, but to illuminate how participants stand within traditions and how these traditions are being re-understood in the present. Attention would be given to the historical and philosophical assumptions shaping participants' judgments, as well as to the ways new meanings emerge when inherited understandings encounter present educational realities. The aim, then, is not merely to determine what works, but to understand more deeply how educational problems themselves are historically constituted and how qualitative inquiry can remain open to the dialogue between past and present.

5. Methods against Methods

> *A (hermeneutic) method has no face, no body, no memories, no stories, no blood, no images, no ancestors, no ghosts and spirits, no monsters, no familiars.*
>
> —Jardine, 2006, p. 272[33]

Hermeneutic understanding refuses to anchor in a safe and confined methodological harbour, and sets itself against natural scientific methods and does not follow a set of predetermined procedures. Gadamer (in Palmer, ed.)[23] claims: "I was not trying to…ensure that the concept of method had the widest possible scope of application; on the contrary, what I thought to show was the concept of method was not an appropriate way of achieving legitimation in the humanities and social sciences" (p. 40). He distinguishes methods in the humanities and social sciences from natural science, aiming at ruling or controlling. Gadamer does not trust the Enlightenment agenda, which strives to master the scientific

method, achieve valid evidence, and therefore eliminate prejudice in experiments. He describes it as "prejudice against prejudices" (Gadamer, p. 272)[19].

Hermeneutic understanding risks being bent, distorted and even failed in the constant to-and-fro movement in hermeneutic circles, but never shuts itself down in the form of guaranteed conclusion. As Gallagher[13] suggests, the hermeneutic circle "sometimes expanding, sometimes shrinking, in the dialectical interplay between fore-structure and reality, between transcendence and appropriation, keeps open the possibilities that define our experience as educational experience" (p. 80). Productive researchers, Gadamer (in Palmer, ed.)[23] describes, distinguish themselves "not in their mastery of methods but their hermeneutical imagination…(which) is the questionableness of something and what this requires of us" (p. 42). I believe imagination and question are two important interrelated concepts in Gadamerian hermeneutic structure. Gadamer contrasts hermeneutic imaginations with preset methods. The to-and-fro structure of hermeneutic understanding highlights imaginations rather than prescribed methods aiming at controlling or managing. Imagination denies the temptation to conclude and keeps the structure of hermeneutic understanding as open as possible. Also, hermeneutic imagination is not a kind of dreamlike imagination. Rather, it involves sensitivity to the relational and historical encounters with texts, others and self. The hermeneutic ghosts of uncertainty and unpredictability in imaginations always haunt the never-ending to-and-fro process of understanding. As Jardine[26] describes, "pursuing interpretive inquiry is a potentially painful process, because it is not produced of a method which (ideally) will keep everything under control" (p. 49). Gadamer[19] suggests that confined horizons or prejudices could not be eliminated or avoided but be challenged and transformed in the structure of a question: "the essence of question opens up possibilities and keeps them open" (p. 299). A hermeneutic question does not aim at finding a definite answer to it but it violates the taken-for-granted and disturbs the original prejudices and creates space for imaginations to join the to-and-fro movement. Prejudices or prejudgments are kept open and cultivated in the processes of imagining and questioning, which will further structure possibilities for better understanding. Empiricism tends to prioritize data-driven conclusions, while Gadamerian hermeneutics suggests that the imaginative exploration of possibilities contributes to a more nuanced and holistic understanding. The empiricist inclination toward finding generalizable patterns and following a more linear trajectory can also be disturbed in enriching, open hermeneutic cycles through a continuous process of questioning and imagination.

In sum, I believe it is the constant questioning of previous prejudices in the to-and-fro movement and negotiating possible ways of understanding the world anew that play essential roles in structuring hermeneutic understanding. The to-and-fro hermeneutic approach entails imaginative openness and readiness to change and transform. We could be addressed by the text or an encounter with a person only if we open ourselves, reach out for it and receive it. The receptiveness does not necessarily demand an acceptance, but shows an invitation for the text or the person to come into a dynamic interplay with the prejudices one previously carries, in the risk of enlarging and transforming it. The to-and-fro movement renders prejudices loose and uncertain and keeps the world "open and enticing and alive and inviting" (Jardine, p. 2)[26].

The interpretive approaches in Confucian understanding have evolved and changed dramatically over its long history. For classical Confucianism, there are also no fixed methods or methodology to follow in terms of understanding. Confucius integrates the seemingly contrasting approaches of restatement and imagination; imitation and creation. He seems to have the ambition to transcend the limitations of linguistics and its structures and understand with imagination to reach the ultimate ontological dao which could go beyond language. As Lin[15] captures: "interpretation is to deconstruct language and set free its meanings, which could be compared to a seed which drops in the earth and then springs out new shoots. Interpretation could grow anew as a living creature" (p. 135). I understand the liveliness of Confucius' understanding lies in the attempt to break away from the confinement of language and structures and then reach the next levels of creativity and intentions of the heart, finally unifying with the ultimate dao[15]. Unlike Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding which lies in the to-and-fro structure to open up the participants' previous horizons, Confucius' understanding tends to enact a hierarchical ordering from understanding the literal meaning of a text to the wordless transcendent dao beyond language[15]. Empiricism tends

to prioritize linguistic and observable elements in the pursuit of knowledge. Confucius would challenge this by suggesting that the liveliness of understanding extends beyond these confines. Also, empiricism may be lacking in the holistic and transcendent aspects of understanding that Confucius associates with the unification with the ultimate dao.

Implications for Reframing Research: Challenging Methodolatry

Reframing empirical research involves a critical examination of the methodological underpinnings that often dominate the research landscape. In the realm of empirical research, the methodology section assumes a pivotal role, presenting data collection methods that lend an air of tidiness and strength to the evidence. However, what often escapes scrutiny is the tendency to normalize and unquestioningly accept methods or methodologies as if they were immutable truths. It is within this context that the perspectives of Gadamer and Confucius offer profound insights, challenging the prevailing methodology in empirical research.

Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to understanding rejects the notion of fixed procedures or a singular "best" scientific method. Instead, it embraces a dynamic to-and-fro movement within hermeneutic circles that may risk being bent, distorted, or even failed, yet steadfastly avoids closing itself off with guaranteed conclusions. Similarly, Confucianism, with its integration of seemingly contrasting approaches such as restatement and imagination, imitation and creation, challenges the notion of a fixed methodology. Confucius aspires to transcend linguistic limitations and structures, seeking the ultimate ontological *dao* that extends beyond language.

This dynamic to-and-fro structure within hermeneutic understanding, when juxtaposed with Confucius' interpretative layers, becomes a valuable lens for researchers seeking to reframe their research. The envisioned movement involves navigating between the past and the present, experiences and theories, eastern and western wisdom traditions, and self and others. The intent is not to provide instrumental or clinical advice or establish causal linkages, but rather to dwell in the creative tension between knowing and not knowing by asking better questions.

In reimagining research paradigms and their pathways, I embrace this to-and-fro movement, resisting confinement within a secure methodological box. The structure is designed to foster ongoing conversations that resist closure, where binary concepts such as past and present, experience and theory, self and other, and eastern and western are continually (re)connected and (re)imagined through their back-and-forth interactions. While Gadamer acknowledges the limitations of language within this movement, Confucius, in contrast, maintains an optimistic stance, envisioning a transcendence beyond linguistic confines.

Following Gadamer's and Confucius' awareness of the inherent limitations of language, I recognize its influential role in shaping understanding. Language is not merely a neutral tool but carries meaning and power, influencing one's comprehension. I acknowledge the need to be more fully aware of the taken-for-granted language we use in empirical research, and hope to imbue them with fresh meanings through a creative process and complicate them with philosophical questions: not only about "how to" or "what works" but also about "why" and "what it means". The research journey, then, becomes a delicate dance between linguistic constraints and the imaginative revitalization of concepts in embodied encounters, guided by the dynamic interplay inspired by philosophical questioning, interrupting and wondering.

A qualitative study on beginning teachers' experiences of classroom uncertainty may, within a conventional method-driven design, proceed through a fixed interview protocol, coding scheme, and analytic sequence intended to identify common challenges and produce stable categories of response. From a Gadamerian-Confucian perspective, however, the inquiry unfolds through a to-and-fro movement rather than a linear progression. A teacher's account of uncertainty invites further questioning; that questioning sends the researcher back to the teacher's words, to the wider educational situation, and to the assumptions initially brought to the study. Understanding emerges in the back-and-forth movement between part and whole, past and present, and researcher and participant. Interviews, observations, and reflective writings, therefore, become not merely instruments for gathering data, but sites of interpretive dialogue through which meanings are revised and deepened. The purpose is not to master the phenomenon through a fixed procedure, but to remain open to the living movement through which understanding gradually takes shape.

6. Understanding for Truths (Rather Than a Truth)

> *Truths should be and must be embodied through human life.*
>
> —Mou, 2010, p. 6

As Palmer[23] captures, hermeneutic understanding is "an event of the disclosure of truth, an event which in true conversation is reached by the partners together" (p. 11). I believe hermeneutic truth should be distinguished from Plato's metaphysical Truth or the Enlightenment's scientific Truth. The truth in Gadamer's hermeneutic inquiry is "not an essentialist but an existential truth; it is not an infinite but a finite, fallible truth, emerging in an experiential, lived encounter" (Palmer, p. 12)[23].

Hermeneutic understanding as a co-creative process is not primarily about uncovering the absolute Truth about the object or the person in investigation. Rather, it is about understanding the truths emergent in a relational and transforming dialogic space between self and the other. Empiricism may struggle to capture the dynamic, evolving nature of truths that emerge through ongoing dialogue and interaction. Hermeneutics introduces a more fluid, multiple and context-dependent understanding of truths. Risser[17] reminds us: "philosophical hermeneutics is about self-understanding…it has to do with our being at home in the world that we are awakened to in the voice of the other" (p. 17). The alterity of the others, historical traditions, cultural heritages, texts is something that addresses us, and makes demands on us. We are pushed and pulled in the dialectic relationship with the otherness and our previously held prejudices are temporarily suspended, questioned, challenged and transformed. The ephemeral and constrained hermeneutic truths emerge from the process of this relationality. Gadamer[18] articulates: "through our finitude, the particularity of our being which is evident even in the variety of languages, the infinite dialogue is opened in the direction of the truth that we are" (p. 16). The truths presuppose constraining and enabling interpretative horizons for each party, but keep questioning and opening up the finite horizons towards a truer understanding in inexhaustible dialogues. Risser[17] reminds us: "the emergence of (truer) meaning is of course an infinite process: fresh sources of error are excluded and new sources of understanding are continuously emerging" (p. 77).

The notion of truth for Confucius is an embodied truth and is closely associated with morality instead of being defined by logical development. Empiricism may struggle to account for the complexity and depth of moral truths that are not easily reducible to quantifiable data points. Or rather, empiricism, with its emphasis on discrete and observable data, may miss the interconnected and holistic nature of truth as envisioned by Confucius. For Confucius, "truths should be and must be embodied through human life" (Mou, p. 6)[22]. Mou suggests ren for Confucius is a truth that all human beings should pursue. Yet, it is not an abstract concept, rather it is a concrete universal in contrast to the often coupled concepts of the abstract and the universal since Aristotelian times in the Western world[21]. On the one hand, ren could only be explained in particular circumstances and presented through concrete human life. The truth of Confucian ren is fundamentally different from mathematical, logical or abstract Truth, rather it "manifests itself in the constraints of particulars" (Mou, p. 6)[22]. On the other hand, ren has an overarching and universal guidance for people and oriented people towards becoming good. Therefore, it is justifiable to claim that ren is both universal and concrete. Confucian truths are explicitly and primarily concerned with moral truths that are deeply embedded in human relationships, which, I believe, could be compared with Gadamer's association of hermeneutics to phronesis which could be understood as a form of "ethical knowing" (Risser, p. 107)[17]. For Confucius, human beings interpret the world not through the "rational and logical argumentation" but through "experiencing the liveliness of human life" (Lin, p. 71)[15]. Reading about Confucius, we could find that knowledge and action are always being moralized, which are manifested in human relations, as Huang[24] coins the phrase "the integration of knowledge and morality" (p. 20) in Confucianism. Huang[24] further argues that the six classics are all texts with the purpose of virtue cultivation. I believe Confucius' truth is moral truth embedded in the particularity of human interactions.

Implications for Reframing Research: Inviting Multiple and Embodied Truths

In the realm of empirical research, the conventional pursuit often centers around the attainment of Truth: conclusions, guidelines and suggestions for educational practition-

ers. However, Gadamer and Confucius offer a refreshing departure from this quest for certainty and homogeneity. Instead, the emphasis shifts towards embracing the multiplicity of truths—finite, fallible, and embodied truths—that are deeply embedded in dynamic human relations.

Gadamer's notion of "finite, fallible truth" and Confucian ideas of embodied and moral truth may become a new compass for guiding research endeavors. The awareness emerges that these truths are context-dependent and intricately tied to specific relationships. This aligns with Mou's concept of truths viewed through a "little hole" and Gadamer's notion of finite horizons, emphasizing the subjective and co-emergent nature of truths within relationships and the fusion of horizons. The purpose, according to both perspectives, is not to uncover a disembodied or transcendent Truth but to explore the finite, ephemeral truths that emerge within specific contexts and relationships. This shift in perspective challenges the traditional notion of Truth with certainty, urging researchers to seek truths within intricate, fluid and lived human experiences.

Confucius' integration of morality and knowledge may become a guiding force, steering the research toward a moral end. The belief is that education is inherently a moral endeavour, transcending the prevalent epistemological concerns in contemporary schools. The pursuit of moral truths involves understanding what constitutes good teaching, fostering good judgment, and discerning desirable relationships between self and others. This moral purpose serves as a scaffold for research, eliciting specific meanings that go beyond mere empirical agendas or quick solutions. The dominance of empiricism concerns people primarily with "how-to" questions rather than "why" or 'what is' types of questions. However, as Confucius tells us, any effort to understand must include both normative and empirical considerations: We need to determine both what we ought to do and how human beings actually learn to understand and act[34].

In this reimagined research approach, the focus is not on providing prescriptive teachings or offering rapid solutions to complex problems. Instead, the aim is to humbly understand particulars better and engage in discussions about the moral truths they might reveal. This departure from a rigid pursuit of an overarching Truth allows for a more nuanced and ethically informed exploration of the diverse truths embedded in the intricate fabric of human experience and relationships.

In a qualitative inquiry into students' experiences of belonging in a teacher education program, a conventional empirical approach may seek to identify the major factors that produce or hinder belonging and then move toward general conclusions or recommendations. A Gadamerian-Confucian approach, however, would not assume that one final Truth about belonging could be extracted from the data. One student may experience belonging through being intellectually challenged, another through being cared for by an instructor, and another through recognition of cultural identity and voice. These truths may not fully align, yet each discloses something significant about lived educational experience. The task of inquiry is therefore not to reduce these accounts into a single explanatory formula, but to remain attentive to the finite, embodied, and relational truths emerging through them. Such truths are not merely descriptive; they also carry moral significance, asking what kinds of relationships, judgments, and practices make educational life more humane and just. Research, in this sense, becomes less a search for certainty than an ethically attuned engagement with the plurality of truths that arise in human experience.

7. Understanding Is to Apply (Act)

> *Application is an element of understanding itself.*
>
> —Gadamer, 1989, xxxii

In a conversation with Dutt, Gadamer (in Palmer ed.)[23] suggests: "hermeneutic process involves not only the moments of understanding…but also the moment of application" (p. 37). Understanding, for Gadamer, does not belong to the theoretical realm. It encompasses application in the ground of practice as its inseparable part. Gadamer's application could not be understood as "relating some pregiven universals to the particular situation" (Gadamer, p. 324)[19]. I believe hermeneutic application is oriented towards action that manifests itself in process with attunement to the particular contexts. Also, hermeneutic application is not a top-down theory-to-practice application. Rather, it builds connections between history and the present, with a recognition that the present is already implicated by the constraint of history and anticipation of the future. Tacit empiricism often relies on the idea of direct observation

and immediate sensory experiences. Gadamer challenges this by asserting that understanding is a dynamic, dialogical process of application that involves a pre-understanding and a continuous interplay between the interpreter's biases and the subject matter. Hermeneutic application is neither a downward bound, which involves implementing a universal rule to particulars, nor an outward bound, which requires setting the standard to measure and evaluate. Rather, the application, which resides in the hermeneutic cycle, tends to be inwardly and mutually applied. The inward application refers to its influence on the formation of the self. Gadamer[19] points out: "the interpreter dealing with a traditional text tries to apply it to himself" (p. 324). This resonates with Aristotle's comment that "we are not inquiring into what excellence or virtue is for the sake of knowing it, but for the sake of becoming good" (Rowe and Broadie, N.E. 1103b28–30)[35]. Hermeneutic application is a transforming and "double" (Risser, p. 89)[17] process. I understand the "double" (Risser, p. 89)[17] application referring to the interactive negotiations and mutual influences between understanding and acting; tradition and the traditionally implicated present; the self and the otherness of a text or a person. Gadamer has no intention to transcend the embeddedness in the contingent and unpredictable life. Rather, hermeneutic wisdom is nourished in the dialectic mutual process of application.

Confucius is also concerned with the integrity of understanding and acting. Confucius points out that understanding must be practiced or acted out (Analects, 1:1)[6–8]. When Zi Gong inquires about a gentleman, the Master replies: "his actions go first of his words" (Analects, 2:13)[6–8]. Confucian ethics is primarily concerned with transforming people into morally good human beings who can act well in the world. Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming[25] claims understanding and acting form a unity (知行合一) (p. 29). Wang[25] raises an example that "one could only suggest he understands filial piety as long as he acts accordingly…Understanding is the guidance for acting, while acting is the practice of understanding…understanding already encompasses acting and vice versa" (p. 30). According to Wang[25], understanding and acting are too often segregated by a heart filled with selfish desires and unjustified appetites. Purifying one's heart, for Wang Yangming[25], is the way to bring understanding and acting together.

Implications for Reframing Research: Bridging Knowing and Acting

Delving deeper into the reimagined landscape of research, a crucial aspect is the integrative relationship between understanding and action within the traditions of Gadamer and Confucius. Gadamer[19] posits that understanding itself involves an inherent application. Similarly, the neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming[25], from the Ming Dynasty, articulates the inseparable unity of understanding and action within the Confucian tradition. According to Wang, the inclination to act virtuously emanates from genuine understanding, and one's comprehension is best gauged by their actions.

While understanding and acting are interconnected, we observe a deliberate separation serving to maintain the objectivity and generalizability of scientific findings in the realm of empirical research. The unification of understanding and acting would help us bridge empirical and philosophical research approaches: they are always and already connected and interwoven. Philosophical research informs not only how we teach but also why we teach what we teach. A foundational belief in this reframed approach is that to understand differently necessitates acting differently and to understand better implies acting better. Understanding is not a passive cognitive process but an active ethical engagement embedded in the realm of action in relationships. The unity of action and understanding is the renewed landscape for research, steering researchers toward meaningful and impactful actions. The purpose of re/search transcends mere accumulation of knowledge about the world; instead, it strives to enhance understanding and prompt ethical and effective actions in the world.

The integrative nature of understanding and action in Gadamerian hermeneutics and Confucian interpretation shapes the orientation of the research towards the end of application or action. The investigation of particulars is not undertaken merely for the sake of knowing; rather, the goal is to deepen understanding and act well in the world. The belief persists that the urge to act well arises from authentic understanding, and the demonstration of comprehension is reflected in one's actions. This philosophy contends that understanding is not confined to mere contemplation but is a dynamic process inseparable from the realm of action, emphasizing the transformative power inherent in understanding

when applied to one's actions and self.

In this context, the research approach needs to avoid dictating instructions to teachers or student teachers about what to do in today's schools. Instead, the invitation is extended to imagine different possibilities in understanding what constitutes good teaching and a good teacher with philosophical inquiries. There is an unguaranteed hope that diverse understandings will usher in transformed applications or actions, fostering rich possibilities in educational contexts.

Wang Yangming's argument may add an intriguing layer, suggesting the necessity of shedding selfish desires to purify one's heart for the recovery of the original integration of understanding and acting. While seemingly making an altruistic claim, the emphasis lies on the relational significance between self and others. This relationality needs to become a focal point in research, echoing Risser's [17] assertion that the task of understanding is to be attentive to what is demanded by the text and the voice of the other. The interplay between self and others becomes a nuanced exploration within the research, acknowledging the profound impact of relational dynamics on understanding and ethical action.

In a qualitative inquiry into a teacher's response to a moment of student exclusion or humiliation in the classroom, a conventional empirical approach may frame the incident as a behavioural problem to be analyzed, categorized, and addressed through an appropriate intervention strategy. In this structure, knowing comes first and acting follows: the researcher seeks to understand what happened and then determine what response is most effective. A Gadamerian-Confucian perspective, however, reveals that understanding already takes shape within the demand to act. The teacher does not first arrive at detached knowledge and then apply it; rather, interpretation unfolds through the practical and moral challenge of responding to the student rightly in the moment. The incident may call the teacher to question prior assumptions about discipline, fairness, care, and authority, and these questions are worked out not only in reflection but in conduct. Interviews, classroom observations, and reflective writing would therefore illuminate how understanding emerges through the teacher's concrete attempts to respond, repair, and restore relationships. What comes into view is a living bridge between knowing and acting, in which understanding is formed through ethical response and action itself becomes a mode of deepened understanding.

8. Conclusions

Reimagining research in the educational field through the lenses of Gadamerian hermeneutics and Confucian interpretation comparative and dialogic lens may address the unbalanced dichotomy of empirical and philosophical approaches to research. It can do so by being more situated historically and philosophically, encouraging methodological dynamism, embracing a multiplicity of ethical truths, and highlighting a unity of understanding and acting. These interconnected thematic clusters may shape and reshape research into a quest for renewed "understanding", with intertwined empirical resources and philosophical complications, rather than a methodological pursuit solely aimed at "determining" or "answering" within the confines of tacit empiricism. To emphasize, the first dimension involves a historical lens, with the integration of Gadamerian and Confucian approaches emphasizing the importance of being historically informed. This integration challenges the conventional empirical paradigm, encouraging a more nuanced exploration of historical context, as articulated by the philosophical significance of tradition. The second facet revolves around a methodological approach that challenges the rigidity of conventional methodologies. Drawing from Gadamer and Confucian interpretive levels, this approach envisions a to-and-fro movement, creating a dynamic and transcending circle. For both Gadamer and Confucius, method is not a prefabricated template that can be used and reused in any research context, as outlined in the Educational Research Methods textbooks. Instead, Gadamer advocates for spontaneity and intertwined movement, while Confucius focuses on tension and transcendence. They both acknowledge the fluidity inherent in the research process, as illuminated by the notion that "education sometimes necessitates discomfort, unsettlement, and friction" (Hansen, p. 104)[31]. Hansen's assertion that discomfort is integral to education resonates with the interplay of Gadamerian and Confucian methodologies insofar as moving beyond empiricist assumptions and into more uncertain, complicated and even messier approaches may bring about discomfort for the researchers. These uncertainties, unsettling moments, and frictions within the renewed educational research landscape may help refresh, and grow better understandings/actions. Rather than seeking definitive answers, the approach cultivates questions and challenges the scientific rationale, firmly

anchoring the inquiry in the complexities of lived experiences. The third dimension centers on understanding truths within relationships, highlighting the interconnectedness of knowledge and the moral underpinnings of understanding. Gadamerian and Confucian perspectives contribute to exploring embodied, changeable, and moral truths in the context of relationships, deepening the understanding within a relational framework. Finally, the exploration extends to the integration of action into the understanding process, drawing inspiration from both Gadamerian and Confucian thoughts. This holistic approach ensures that research not only seeks knowledge but actively contributes to the engagement with the world, aligning with Marcus's[36] perspective that "the impediment to action advances action" (p. 60). Hence, philosophical research is not about floating ideas, being separate from or even impeding action, they are always already embedded in experiences and actions and would advance our actions in better informed ways.

Of course, the proposed Gadamerian-Confucian lens to re-imagine educational research is not without risks. One anticipated objection is that it may romanticize tradition, especially if tradition is treated as inherently wise rather than as historically layered, contested, and at times exclusionary. A second objection, coming from evidence-based research, is that an emphasis on historicity, embodied truth, and interpretive judgment may weaken standards of rigor or make inquiry too resistant to evaluation. Yet the point of this essay is not to replace empirical evidence with reverence for tradition, nor to dissolve judgment into relativism. Rather, Gadamerian historicity reminds us that all inquiry already begins from historically conditioned horizons, while Confucian and Gadamerian emphases on phronesis, moral discernment, and application insist that good research must remain responsive to concrete situations rather than merely follow procedural rules. On this view, tradition is neither idolized nor discarded, evidence is neither rejected nor absolutized, and rigor lies not in methodological control but in reflexivity, interpretive openness, and practical wisdom. What this renewed lens offers, then, is not an escape from tension but a way of working more honestly and fruitfully within it. I hope this paper may serve as a catalyst for further inquiry about paradigms of research: asking fundamental questions about what research is and how we do research, and breaking through the dichotomy in research landscapes. Oriented toward a better understanding, I find myself echoing Qu Yuan's sentiment of *continuous seeking* in his poem, "the way stretches endless ahead, I will never stop seeking." *Seeking* returns us to the etymological root of doing research. The journey of seeking better understanding, as we are doing our research, may be unpredictable, messy, uncertain, surprising, enriching rather than merely procedural, disciplined, methodological, secure, tidy, and clean—as empirical approaches too often train us.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

The author declares that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

References

[1] Farnsworth, V., Solomon, Y. (Eds.), 2013. Reframing Educational Research: Resisting the 'What Works' Agenda. Routledge: London, UK. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203590737

[2] Biesta, G., 2026. Has research on "what works" in education been looking at the wrong interventions? Revisiting "why 'what works' won't work". Educational Theory. 76(1), 16–24. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.70063

[3] Chamberlain, K., 2000. Methodolatry and qualitative health research. Journal of Health Psychology. 5(3), 285–296. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/135910530000500306

[4] Bernstein, R., 1983. Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis. University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, USA. DOI: https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812205503

[5] Palmer, R.E., 2006. Gadamer and Confucius: Some possible affinities. Journal of Chinese Philosophy. 33(s1), 81–93. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6253.2006.00392.x

[6] Huang, C., 1997. The Analects of Confucius: A Literal Translation with an Introduction and Notes. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195061574.001.0001

[7] Legge, J., 1930. The Four Books (Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius). The Chinese Book Company: Shanghai, China.

[8] Leys, S. 1997. The Analects of Confucius. Norton & Company: New York, NY, USA.

[9] Kermode, F., 1979. The Genesis of Secrecy. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA.

[10] Chambers, C., 2003. "As Canadian as possible under the circumstances": A view of contemporary curriculum discourses in Canada. In: Pinar, W. (Ed.). International Handbook of Curriculum Research. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, NJ, USA. pp. 221–252.

[11] Gadamer, H.-G., 2008. Aesthetics and hermeneutics. In: Linge, D. (Trans.). 2008. Hans-Georg Gadamer: Philosophical Hermeneutics. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA. pp. 18–43.

[12] Cajete, G., 2000. Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence. Clear Light Publishers: Santa Fe, NM, USA.

[13] Gallagher, S., 1992. Hermeneutics and Education. State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, USA. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9781438403694

[14] Jing, H.F., 2008. The three epochs of Confucian interpretation. In: Huang, X., Li, Y. (Eds.). Confucian Classics Interpretative Methods. East China Normal University Press: Shanghai, China. pp. 85–104. (in Chinese)

[15] Lin, A., 2009. Chinese Humanitarian Interpretation. Taiwan Xueshengshuju Press: Taipei, Taiwan. (in Chinese)

[16] Zhang, J., Mou, Z., Tang, J., 1986. A Manifesto for a Re-Appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture. In: Zhang, J. (Ed.). The History of Neo-Confucianism Thoughts. Hongwenguan Publisher: Taipei, Taiwan. (in Chinese)

[17] Risser, J., 1997. Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics. State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, USA.

[18] Gadamer, H.G., 2008. The universality of the hermeneutical problem. In: Linge, D. (Trans.). Hans-Georg Gadamer: Philosophical Hermeneutics. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA. pp. 3–17.

[19] Gadamer, H.G., 1989. Truth and Method. Weinsheimer, J., Marshall, D.G. (Trans.). Continuum: New York, NY, USA.

[20] Lu, J., Chui, Z. (Ed.), 1980. The Collected Works of Lu Jiuyuan. Zhong Hua Shu Ju: Beijing, China. (in Chinese)

[21] Mou, Z., 2005. Nineteen Talks on Chinese Philosophy. Gu Ji Press: Shanghai, China. (in Chinese)

[22] Mou, Z., 2010. Fourteen Talks on Eastern and Western Philosophy. Jilin Press: Changchun, China. (in Chinese)

[23] Gadamer, H.G., 2001. Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary. Palmer, R.E. (Trans.). Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, USA.

[24] Huang, J., 2004. General Introduction to Educational Philosophy. Shan Xi Education Press: Xi'an, China. (in Chinese)

[25] Wang, Y., 2008. Chuan Xi Lu. Ye, S.J. (Ed.). Shangwu Yinshuguan: Beijing, China. (in Chinese)

[26] Jardine, D., 1998. To Dwell with a Boundless Heart: Essays in Curriculum Theory, Hermeneutics, and the Ecological Imagination. Peter Lang Publishing: New York, NY, USA.

[27] Smith, D., 1996. The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In Pedagon: Interdisciplinary Essays in the Human Sciences, Pedagogy and Culture. Peter Lang Publishing: New York, NY, USA. pp. 27–44.

[28] Dawson, R., 1981. Confucius. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

[29] Lancashire, D., 1965. A Confucian interpretation of history. Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia. 3(1), 76–86.

[30] Li, Z., 2004. Reading the Analects Today. San Lian Press: Beijing, China. (in Chinese)

[31] Hansen, D., 2011. The Teacher and the World: A Study of Cosmopolitanism as Education. Routledge: New York, NY, USA.

[32] Burman, J.T., 2017. Philosophical histories can be contextual without being sociological: Comment on Araujo's historiography. Theory & Psychology. 27(1), 117–125. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354316682862

[33] Jardine, D.W., 2006. On Hermeneutics: "Over and Above Our Wanting and Doing". In: Tobin, K., Kincheloe, J. (Eds.). Doing Educational Research—A Handbook. Sense Publishers: Rotterdam, The Netherlands. pp. 269–288. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087901202_012

[34] Ma, Y., 2024. The Ethics of Becoming a Good Teacher: In Conversation with Aristotle and Confucius. Rout-

ledge: New York, NY, USA. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003378525

[35] Rowe, C., Broadie, S. (Eds.), 2002. Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

[36] Marcus, A., 2003. Meditations. Heys, G. (Trans.). Modern Library: New York, NY, USA.