1. INTRODUCTION

HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Understanding hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method requires the definition and discussion of terms that may initially appear daunting – beginning with the phrase “hermeneutic phenomenology” itself. Phenomenology is the study of experience, particularly as it is lived and as it is structured through consciousness. “Experience” in this context refers not so much to accumulated evidence or knowledge as something that we “undergo.” It is something that happens to us, and not something accumulated and mastered by us. Phenomenology asks that we be open to experience in this sense. Hermeneutics, for its part, is the art and science of interpretation and thus also of meaning. Meaning in this context is not a thing that is final and stable, but something that is continuously open to new insight and interpretation. Hermeneutic phenomenology is consequently the study of experience together with its meanings. Like hermeneutics, this type of phenomenology is open to revision and reinterpretation: it is about an openness to meaning and to possible experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology, in short, is as much a disposition and attitude as it is a distinct method or program for inquiry. As Max van Manen, one of the principle proponents of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method, puts it: This approach represents an “attitude or disposition of sensitivity and openness: it is a matter of openness to everyday, experienced meanings as opposed to theoretical ones” (2002, n.p.).

As it is considered in this collection, namely as a qualitative research method in educational (and related) research, hermeneutic phenomenology is clearly distinct from other qualitative research methods, and also from other phenomenological approaches. It rejects the claim of some phenomenological methods that ideal “essences” of experience or consciousness can be isolated outside of the researcher’s cultural and historical location. In its emphasis on the interpretation and reinterpretation of meaning, it rejects any “transcendental” claim to meaning or any research conclusions that are fixed once and for all. It does not study objects or phenomena as (potentially) objective, but as necessarily meaningful. As Emmanuel Levinas says, it does not seek to “understand the object, but its meaning” (1987, p. 110, italics added). Also, unlike many other phenomenological and qualitative research approaches, hermeneutic phenomenology is particularly open to literary and poetic qualities of language, and encourages aesthetically sensitized writing as both a process and product of research.

* * *

In this introduction, we describe these and other characteristics of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method primarily in education and secondarily, in
related fields such as healthcare and social work. We show how these qualities are both discussed explicitly and illustrated implicitly in the various chapters of this collection. We begin with an overview of the history and philosophy associated with hermeneutic phenomenology, and we describe some of the presuppositions underlying it. We then provide an overview of the chapters gathered together in this collection, and subsequently, we conclude by drawing out a number of themes prevalent in these individual texts.

Phenomenology has its origins in the work of Edmund Husserl, who framed it primarily in philosophical terms – specifically as study of “essences,” of transcendental, ideal structures of consciousness. Since Husserl’s time, phenomenology as both a philosophy and method of inquiry has developed in a number of different directions, often reflecting distinct philosophical orientations. One of the key occurrences in this history is its movement from the idealist or “transcendental” realm of essences to the “immanent” world of everyday objects and concerns. This development, as well as others in the history of hermeneutic phenomenology, is marked through the contributions of key philosophical figures. Some of the most celebrated are Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Paul Sartre, who have both widened and deepened its philosophical features. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, played a particularly important (and at times problematic) role in emphasizing the phenomenology’s concern with “immanence,” and in connecting it with hermeneutics. Heidegger articulated these emphases or shifts in the program of phenomenology by placing priority on the study of “being,” on how we find ourselves or simply “are” in the world. This is a type of study otherwise known as “ontology.”

In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger explains that our ontology or being in the world, presents us with a fundamentally “hermeneutical Situation” (sic; p. 275). This is a situation, as he describes it, in which we are compelled to ask questions about ourselves, about the nature of the (hermeneutic) situation itself, and about who we should be and become in it. As Nelson puts it, this situation is one “in which I always find myself … to be a question for me and [which] places me into question.” Heidegger, for his part, puts this somewhat more abstractly:

such an Interpretation obliges us first to give a phenomenal characterization of the entity we have taken as our theme, and thus to bring it into the scope of our forehavig [Vorhaben; plan/intention], with which all the subsequent steps of our analysis are to conform. (p. 275)

Hermeneutics as the art and science of interpretation is understood here as necessitated by our ontology; it is required by our situation in the world. This situation places us in question and is a question for us. And the phenomenal characterization of these themes forms the basis “with which all the subsequent steps of our analysis are to conform.”

Hermeneutician Paul Ricoeur (1991) explains the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics as follows:

beyond the simple opposition there exists, between phenomenology and hermeneutics, a mutual belonging which it is important to make explicit … On the one hand,
hermeneutics is erected on the basis of phenomenology and thus preserves something of the philosophy from which it nevertheless differs: phenomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics. On the other hand, phenomenology cannot constitute itself without a hermeneutical presupposition. (pp. 25-26)

In other words, it is impossible to study experience without simultaneously inquiring into its meaning, and it is impossible to study meaning without experiential grounding. Ricoeur goes further by explaining that language is also inextricably involved in this mutual dependency of meaning and experience:

Experience [not only] can be said, it demands to be said. To bring it to language is not to change it into something else but, in articulating and developing it, to make it become itself. (p. 39)

Experience and language, for both Ricoeur and for the hermeneutic phenomenology he is describing, are co-emergent, with language having not merely a descriptive function, but one that is expressive, and “co-constitutive” of experience. As Lye (1996, n.p.) explains, “Our symbolic world is not separate from our beings, especially in regard to language: we ‘are’ language.” Experience becomes what it is when it is put into language, particularly when this language has figurative, rhythmic, alliterative or related qualities that connect it with sounds, rhythms, and figures as they are (or can be) experienced. It is in this sense or for this reason that phenomenology encourages aesthetically sensitized writing as both part of the research process and in the completed research product.

In last few decades of the 20th century, research in education has seen an increasing interest in qualitative methods like hermeneutic phenomenology. This has been accompanied by a shift from exclusively deductive research and explanation to an acknowledgement of the value of inductive research and understanding – approaches that derive their findings by beginning with concrete particulars. The awakening of interest in phenomenology can be explained by an accompanying emphasis on everyday concerns in the domain of public and professional practices like education. Phenomenological research in these fields is frequently undertaken by scholars who have strong roots in their own disciplines. As a result, phenomenology can be said to have evolved into a relatively mature empirical science, capable of being attuned to the methodological needs associated with each specific discipline in question. These individual disciplinary domains provide fertile soil for methodological variations associated with phenomenology and hermeneutics – methods sometimes collectively known as the “human sciences.”

Seen as a research method, phenomenology in general (rather than hermeneutic phenomenology in particular) has in the last thirty of forty years been developed as a method in for undertaking research in fields such as education, nursing, psychology, and social work. A wide range of phenomenological methods or pathways have developed, and these can be described briefly by characterizing scholars and methodological innovators as falling into two generations. The first might start with van Kaam (1966) in psychology, whose broadly descriptive approach was developed further in the context of what has come to be known as
the Duquesne school of phenomenological psychology. Amedeo Giorgi (1970, 1985), one of the most prominent members of this school, formalized descriptive phenomenology into what is known as an “empirical-structural” method – an approach characterized as “classically Husserlian.” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 55). Also coming from psychology, Donald Polkinghorne (1983) has developed an approach that gives particular emphasis to the role of narrative, and Colaizzi and Moustakas (1990, 1994) have made contributions that underscore dialogue, as well as the researcher’s own of self-discovery, in the research process. In this context, van Manen (1990) stands out as having developed a type of phenomenology that is explicitly and emphatically hermeneutic, and also as having a focus which is primarily educational.

A second generation of practice-oriented phenomenological scholars have continued this tradition of intradisciplinary and transdisciplinary methodological experimentation and innovation. These phenomenological researchers, who have written on phenomenology as method is a more or less closely knit group, and have published on their own or together in various constellations – with some having contributions in this collection. Some of the orientations build on Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, but also include significant reference to subsequent developments in the phenomenological tradition. At Bournemouth University, Les Todres (2007) has developed a phenomenology, building on the works of Giorgi, which shows how poetic dimensions help researchers in health and social care and in psychology flesh out and understand lived experiences. Closely linked to the work of Todres is the Swedish researcher Karin Dahlberg (2008), whose reflective lifeworld method is widely used even outside Sweden. Writing from the disciplinary perspective of psychology, and from the UK, are Finlay (2011; see also in this volume) and Langridge (2007), who have published extensively on phenomenology as method. Among the UK based researchers, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) stand out with their Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The orientation is described as hermeneutic, but the theoretical foundation seems to rely more on the works of contemporary colleagues than on the philosophical works of Heidegger, Gadamer, or Ricoeur. At Seattle University, Steen Halling (2008) has developed what he calls “Dialogical Phenomenology,” which puts emphasis on the researchers’ participation and their dialectical co-operation, like the methods of Colaizzi and Moustakas before him. Like Todres, Halling appreciates and sees literature and poetry as important features of description and understanding.

This book provides an overview, or perhaps more accurately, a sampling of hermeneutic phenomenological research and methods from some of the many perspectives identified briefly here. Whether these methods are considered “pure” and methodologically “rigorous,” or whether they are viewed as hybrids giving the researcher freedom to improvise, the focus in this volume is to show how and why phenomenological research can promote different knowledge and deeper understanding of pedagogical practice.
PART I: INTRODUCING HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

The first perspective from which this method is explored is the methodological and philosophical: How does hermeneutic phenomenology differ methodologically from other phenomenological orientations in research? What is the epistemology and ontology underpinning hermeneutic phenomenology? How widely do these methodological foundational understandings of method converge or diverge in the literature and in practice? Questions of these kinds form the focus of the first part of the book, “Introducing Hermeneutic Phenomenology,” which explores the method in terms of the metaphorical aspects of sound, voice and aurality. The vocabulary of the “ear” is perhaps better suited to a discussion of presence, disposition and ontology, than in the terms of vision and the eye. This visual vocabulary, with its emphasis on distance, observation and analysis – rather than the rhythm, feeling and ambience associated with the ear – is all too familiar from positivistic philosophical and natural-scientific traditions.

There are today a number of phenomenological research methods, towards which educational researchers can lean; hermeneutic phenomenology is only one. But what counts as phenomenology overall or in general? Are there certain boundaries which we need to keep within in order to claim that we are doing phenomenological research? If so, who decides on and guards these boundaries?

In Chapter 2, Debating phenomenological methods, Linda Finlay goes much further in inquiring into and differentiating between different types of orientations in phenomenological research than we have been able in this introduction. She asks: What counts as phenomenology? How do the various orientations differ from one another and what might they have in common? In a personal manner, Finlay offers a mapping of some of the most widely used methods today. Six particular questions are raised and contested: (1) How tightly or loosely should we define what counts as phenomenology? (2) Should we always aim to produce a general (normative) description of the phenomenon or is idiographic analysis a legitimate aim? (3) To what extent should interpretation be involved in our descriptions? (4) Should we attempt to set aside or to foreground researcher subjectivity? (5) Should phenomenology be more science than art? (6) Is phenomenology a modernist or post-modernist project or is it neither? Finlay discusses these six questions by referring to some of the most knowledgeable contemporary phenomenological researchers, tracing their standpoints back to their respective philosophical roots. Finlay also expresses her own position on the question: What counts as phenomenology? Phenomenological research, she insists, needs to involve rich descriptions of the life-world or lived experience. Echoing Roth’s conclusion (in Chapter 5), Finlay emphasizes that the researcher needs to adopt a phenomenological attitude in which judgements about the phenomenon in question are suspended. Finlay’s chapter offers an excellent starting point for beginners in the field of phenomenological research. For more experienced researchers, Finlay’s text serves as a reminder of the importance of methodical and methodological awareness.
In Chapter 3, *The phenomenological voice: It, I, we and you*, Norm Friesen provides an approach that is similarly amenable to the needs of beginners and the expectations of more advanced researchers. He explores the relation between lived experience, its voice, and ethics. By identifying and describing four different voices or perspectives — “I,” “you,” “it,” and “we” — Friesen shows the interconnection of different kinds of knowledge, whether natural scientific, subjective, intersubjective or ethical. Lived experiences are initially figured by Friesen as constitutive of subjective knowledge, which only be described by an “I,” but this “I” is not just a unique person: the “I” is first and foremost a human being among other human beings. The “I,” Friesen goes on to show, is always already defined in terms of the “we,” which he identifies as the perspective of intersubjectivity.

The “we,” however, presents a challenge, since it is “sometimes associated with the suppression of difference and even with acts of hate.” By showing how lived time, space, body and relation are intimately interconnected and how our life-world is expressed through language, Friesen arrives at the conclusion that the pronoun “we,” in phenomenological writing, invites the reader to affirm or differ with what is being said. Phenomenological texts could be described as “open conversations into the future” (Cooley, 1902, p. 9). Or as Friesen puts it perhaps more phenomenologically: “[a text] invites the reader to breathe his or her own life into its descriptions and meanings.” This, in itself, is an ethical act, involving practices and knowledge that are normative, or can be judged — at least to some degree — in terms of “right” or wrong” Friesen holds.

The theme of language and ethics continues in Chapter 4, “An event in sound” — *Considerations on the ethical-aesthetic traits of the hermeneutic phenomenological text*, but is treated from a slightly different angle. Bringing up a variation on what will become a familiar theme in this collection, Henriksson and Saevi’s focus is the voice of the text and its aesthetic-ethical dimensions. How can a text remain true to descriptions and interpretations of any lived experience, given that they contain possibilities which are prereflective, and in this sense, also prelinguistic? This challenge can be illustrated by citing a work of fiction:

In ancient times, in certain dry areas, there lived a feline called largodil with long neck and short legs. It is said that the scribes of a certain tribe, who passed through the Sinai desert, used the shape of the animal as a basis for a sign, which in course of time and through the Phoenicians, became the letter L. Barely had they started to scribble the sign on the first cave walls before the largodil disappeared from the face of the earth. (Kjaerstad, 2002, p. 17)

Intrigued by Kjaerstad’s text and challenged by van Manen’s (2002b) postulate that “every word kills and becomes the death of the object it tries to represent” (p. 244), Henriksson and Saevi undertake a careful examination of the relationship between poetry, poetic writing, literature, traditional academic writing, and lived experiences. The authors hold that lived experiences can be understood metaphorically, as “events in sound” which have the ethical and aesthetic virtues of both truth and beauty. Henriksson and Saevi argue that, as hermeneutic
phenomenological writers, we dwell in the borderland between a “poetic attitude” and a utilitarian writing style.

In Chapter 5, *Cognitive Phenomenology: Tracking the microtonality in/of learning*, education research methodologist and science education researcher, Wolff-Michael Roth undertakes what he refers to as “cognitive phenomenological” investigation. Phenomenological research, Roth implies, is the study of “micro-tonality” and “micro-emotionality” of experiences of a “fraction of a second” in an attempt to uncover the “pre-noetic,” experience as it arises before interpretation or reflection. Roth emphasizes that the study of this pre-reflective experience must begin with a recognition of passivity in human engagements. Such a passivity, Roth explains, that is “not the counterpart of will”; it is not voluntary, but rather, is part of a way of engaging, an orientation or attitude. With his focus on the pre-intentional, prereflective and passive, Roth puts his finger on a tension that underlies hermeneutic-phenomenological investigation: Namely, its attempt to use reflection and description – which are both active and guided by intention – to get closer to that which is prereflective and not intentional and in this sense, sometimes passive. Van Manen refers to this as the “pathic,” Waldenfels uses the phrase “that which is not willed,” and Roth characterizes it enigmatically as “passibility” – a term he defines elsewhere simply as “our capacity to be affected” (2011, p. 18).

As Friesen does in Chapter 3, Roth refers to both “first” and “third person perspectives” to identify ways of looking at the world that are relevant to phenomenological research. However, Roth’s intended meaning is markedly different: It is phenomenological descriptions in Roth’s chapter that are told from the perspectives of the first and third person, in a literal, grammatical sense, as either the author’s own experience or as that of someone else. These “perspectives” do not correspond to knowledge that is either singularly subjective, or that makes the claim to an impersonal objectivity, as Friesen discusses. After taking the reader through a series of descriptions and examples, in both the first and third person grammatical perspectives, Roth comes to a conclusion that highlights the affinity of his approach with hermeneutic phenomenology as it is represented in much of the rest of this book: Both are concerned with the avoidance of “the third” – of laws, rules and order, whether theoretical or methodological in origin – which “interferes with and contaminates the foreign or strange.” All hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with avoiding the labels and “laws” of theory, which – as Henriksson and Saevi have pointed out – can all too easily “kill” the phenomenon under investigation. Attempts to negotiate this difficult and in some ways impossible avoidance of the orders of theory and of methodological prescription are, in different ways, discussed and demonstrated in the papers that follow these three introductory chapters.

**PART II: HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY: REFLECTION AND PRACTICE**

The second part of the book follows by sounding out the relationship between method, theory, reflection and practice, showing these interrelationships to be both intricate and integral. Hermeneutic phenomenology uses concrete examples and
descriptive, reflective writing to take scholarly discourse out of the realm of explicit, theoretical generality and bring it closer to the particularities of engaged practice. It does this in the hope of fostering a kind of pathic, non-cognitive forms of awareness – the attitude or disposition that is fundamental to hermeneutic phenomenological investigation itself. The language of theory and generality, and the competencies and capabilities associated with it, can draw researchers and practitioners away from this type of awareness.

In Chapter 7, *Hermeneutic phenomenology and pedagogical practice*, Carina Henriksson explores the connection between educational research and pedagogical practice. In doing so, she takes as a starting point Merleau-Ponty’s suggestion that phenomenology “has given a number of present-day readers the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what they had been waiting for” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. viii). But: What is it that teachers have been waiting for? In answering this question Henriksson shows us how pedagogical practice is often at odds with research and theory, since the latter do not address questions in their concrete situatedness: What do I say to my class at this moment? What can I do for this child? Through lived-experience descriptions and narratives, Henriksson illuminates some of the aspects of pedagogical practice which are often overlooked in research, but deeply felt by teachers. The experiential accounts and Henriksson’s understanding of them points out how hermeneutic phenomenology can give teachers a different knowledge and deeper understanding of what goes on in classrooms – and this knowledge, she avers, represents “what they had been waiting for.”

With its strong focus on the lifeworld and lived experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology bridges the gap between what theory and educational documents say should take place in the classroom and what actually takes place in every-day pedagogical practice. As such, this method, approach, attitude or disposition could be described as a “reality check.” Hermeneutic phenomenology is also a relatively seamless way of seeing pedagogy. Framed by ethical considerations, it involves hand (acting), heart (feeling), and head (thinking). As discussed above, hermeneutic phenomenology embraces the thought that language and our world view are intertwined: language shapes our world and our world is shaped by language. Hermeneutic phenomenology writes and talks in a language, which as Henriksson argues, makes the world of pedagogical practice recognizable for teachers.

Chapter 6, *The creativity of ‘unspecialization’: A contemplative direction for integrative scholarly practice*, by Kate Galvin and Les Todres starts with an exploration into forms of knowledge that since the beginning of the modern era, have guided scholarship in relation to practice. What was once seen as modernity’s great dignity – the differentiation of science, art, and morality – has become postmodernity’s great disaster, the dis-integration of knowing, valuing and doing.

Drawing on Aristotle and his concept of *phronesis* in which knowing, doing and valuing are inseparably intertwined, Galvin and Todres connect it to Heidegger on *Denken* and Gendlin on the “entry into the implicit.” Based on this, the authors promote ways of knowing and acting that are “unspecialized,” since they involve
ways of integrating the knowledge of head, heart and hand. Such an integrated form of knowledge would see scholarship as a “seamless” way of being. But what is this way of being?

Galvin and Todres identify this as essentially an embodied way of being, and they offer an experiential account of an artist who is struggling to find an expression for “more than words can say.” The meaning at the core of this experiential account is easily translatable to other professional practices such as nursing, counselling, and pedagogy. Teachers, nurses, and psychologists are often in a position in which they struggle to find ways of seeing their pupils, patients, and clients holistically through their lived experiences.

Throughout the chapter, Galvin and Todres show how forms of applied knowledge, which integrate knowing and being, and include the ethical dimension of the ‘good,’ are constitutive of the creativity of “unspecialization.” In this way, the authors point us to a different view on what scholarship can be, in its integration with practice, and how integrated, applied knowledge can present a path to a more profound and reflective involvement in human existence.

PART III: A “SCIENCE OF EXAMPLES”: ILLUSTRATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Phenomenology has been famously described as “a science of examples” (van den Berg, 1955, p. 54) and the book concludes with a small number of examples of the application of hermeneutic phenomenology to research in education. These feature adaptations and modifications to the method that include its combination with photography and narrative, and drawing and interviewing techniques. Van Manen uses the phrases “methodical reduction” and “flexible narrative rationality” to characterize these and other types of adaptations of the method to the subject matter being investigated. Like the more general phenomenological reduction, its methodological counterpart entails the “bracketing” of established answers and approaches to what is being researched. But whereas the phenomenological reduction involves the exclusion of conventional theoretical explanations that may get in the way of the lived experience, the methodological reduction requires the exclusion of methodological convention:

Bracket all established investigative methods or techniques, and seek or invent an approach that seems to fit most appropriately the phenomenological topic under study. … One must experiment with a methodologically informed inventiveness that fuses the reflective and the prereflective life of consciousness. One needs to invent a flexible narrative rationality, a method for investigating and representing the phenomenon in question. (2002, n.p.)

In both the methodological and the general phenomenological reductions – as well as in van Manen’s characterization of “flexible narrative rationality,” Roth’s earlier statements concerning the exclusion of “the third” take clear, practical form: Although it can never be accessed in “unfalsified” or purely pre-noetic terms, phenomenology has as its goal the exclusion of the third, of theoretical or
methodological “answers” that would come between the researcher and the experience under investigation.

In Chapter 8, the focus of Anna Kirova and Michael Emme’s methodological experimentation is to be found in the genre of the Fotonovela. This is a genre or method that presents a method which bridges hermeneutic phenomenology and arts-based research by combining photography with basic verbal and pictorial elements. The method was originally developed as a means to let immigrant children express their lived experiences of the first school day in their new country. The main question is, “What methods of inquiry can be used to access ‘embodied understanding’ more directly, and, in particular, the lifeworlds of immigrant children as they leave the familiar ‘home world’ and enter the ‘alien world’ of a new school?” Besides the emphasis on the photonovella, this question is explored with the help of three theoretical notions: Gadamer’s notion of understanding as a linguistic “happening,” the constantly renewed enactment of tradition; Heidegger’s understanding of the relationship between language and being; and Gendlin’s belief that our relational and bodily understandings exceed any precisely formulated “languaged,” or otherwise patterned, ways of describing it. In conclusion, Kirova and Emme argue that the fotonovela, as a collage method, that may offer a deeper understanding of embodied experiences and the complex relationships between body, language, and image.

The relationship between body, movement, and language is further explored in Chapter 9, Charlotte Svendler Nielsen’s *Children's embodied voices: Approaching children's experiences through multi-modal interviewing*. Building on Merleau-Ponty, Gendlin, and Mindell, Svendler Nielsen develops a multi-modal interview method, which enables explorations of how children experience their bodies in movement and how these experiences can be expressed through language, drawings, music, and movement itself. Step by step, and through examples from her research, Svendler Nielsen explains the different phases of the multi-modal interviewing approach. She also describes how she has created narratives from interviews and children’s log books and drawings, and how these narratives were analyzed and interpreted. Svendler Nielsen closes her chapter with an insightful discussion on how her multi-modal approach could be used as a pedagogical tool, and how teachers’ awareness of children’s experience bodily movement can ultimately affect the child’s well-being, relationships, and quality of life.

Chapter 10, *Seeking pedagogical places* by Andrew Foran and Margaret Olson, is not about reflection in an overt sense; rather it is an appeal for us to reflect on pedagogical practice. Where does teaching take place and what is the meaning of pedagogical places? When does a space become a place where education unfolds? School rules often set the limit for when teaching is supposed to take place and school buildings often set the physical limits for where teaching and learning are appropriate: teaching and learning take place during the daytime in classrooms. By means of evocative anecdotes, all written by teachers, Foran and Olson show that a pedagogical place actually has little to do with the physical surroundings. Rather, any place that draws teacher and students together, any place where teachers and students are absorbed and drawn into an educative experience is a pedagogical
place. One of the conclusions that Foran and Olson formulate is that “the importance a place can have in a person’s being can border on spiritual sanctity… This is a full-body experience, the intentional awareness of being-in-the-world that encourages the body, beyond the desk, the classroom, or the school.”

Educative experiences, as Kirova and Emme points out, can happen anywhere and anytime. Not just for the student but for the teacher too. Consider this poem from the Swedish author, Sven Nyberg:

After all my years at university
I was assigned
to check the boys’ toilet
before morning assembly.

One bleak winter morning,
in my zealously,
I caught a thirteen-year old
special-ed student,
who somewhat helplessly
sucked on a cigarette.

“And who is this, then?”
my stern voice echoed.

The boy looked me
straight into my eyes
“A human being,” he
solemnly said.

It would take a very uncaring teacher not to have pause for thought when reading an account of this kind. Poems and other types of literature can be powerful and transformative, as they situate our embodied being in concrete particularities – which abound in Nyberg’s brief and relatively terse poem: “after years of university,” “the bleak morning” before the assembly, and the helplessness of the thirteen year-old. In this way, literature is able to connect us in significant ways to the world and to ourselves.

In Chapter 11, How literature works: Poetry and the phenomenology of reader response, Patrick Howard investigates some of these special powers of literature. Building on Rosenblatt’s notion of a mutual transaction occurring between reader and text, Howard employs hermeneutic phenomenology to further explore how the text can be lived and felt. The first few pages of the chapter lets us be a part of a lesson in which a grade 9 class, together with their teacher, reads and comments on poems written by local poets. Howard, a very talented writer himself, shows, through his writing about the lesson, how literature is educative or formative because it is an aesthetic experience which can have lived meaning for the student.
One student’s written response to a poem becomes the backdrop for Howard’s further exploration into literary engagement, texts as “situations,” and embodied language. In the hands of Howard, this student’s comment on the poem vividly illustrates Bachelard’s (1958/1994) observation of how

The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us … It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being. (p. xxiii)

As a scholar of both literature and phenomenology, Bachelard helps teachers – and students – see what can be possible by cultivating a deeper understanding of reader and text.

* * *

As the reader will see, each chapter in this collection has its own unique way of describing, understanding and engaging with hermeneutic phenomenology. The reader will also notice that none of the chapters offers a ready-made manual for doing hermeneutic phenomenological research. Instead, this book should be seen as offering different pathways within a common methodological landscape. This certainly makes hermeneutic phenomenology more difficult and elusive than other methods, but as both Gadamer (1975) and Rorty (1979) maintain, the method of phenomenology is that there is no method.

The fact that there is “no” method might leave us with a feeling of abandonment, of being left in the middle of nowhere with nothing more than a burning desire to undertake an experientially meaningful research study. So, to whom do we turn for guidance?

In phenomenological philosophy and methodology we find the tools we need to design a method for our research question; the phenomenological scholars provide us with theoretical knowledge. But in the process of understanding this knowledge, there is an obvious danger that literature confuses more than it clarifies. When we find that there is a plethora of perspectives within phenomenology, our open mind might turn into the antithesis – a closed mind.

If there is no method and if the philosophers we turn to do not challenge us, there is just one salvation on the road to method: the research question. Moustakas (1990) puts it well when he says:

The heuristic researcher is not only intimately and autobiographically related to the question but learns to love the question. It becomes a kind of song into which the researcher breathes life not… because the question leads to an answer, but also because the question itself is infused in the researcher’s being. It creates a thirst to discover, to clarify, and to understand crucial dimensions of knowledge. (p. 43)
INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has undertaken hermeneutic-phenomenological research knows how a research question, at the beginning, is difficult to put into words. It is there, but more as an extra-linguistic feeling or sensing or empathy; waiting to play, to challenge, to tease us, even to command us – but finally to also liberate us. This thirst to discover, clarify and understand the research question is ultimately an attentive, unchained wandering into the soul of the question. Through reflection, we may find that what we actively have been searching for was already there, passively waiting for our acknowledgment.

* * *

Finally, in introducing this collection, we are grateful to acknowledge the indispensible role that the online, open access journal, *Phenomenology & Practice* has played both in providing the vast majority of the chapters presented in this collection, and in developing, since its inauguration in 2006, a communal forum for hermeneutic phenomenological writing. With the exception of chapters 3 and 5 (and this introductory chapter), all of the contributions to this collection originally appeared in *Phenomenology & Practice*, and four of these chapters originally appeared in a special issue on methodology published in 2009. Chapter 3, Norm Friesen’s *Experiential evidence: I, we and you* has been adapted from his 2011 monograph, *The Place of the Classroom and the Space of the Screen: Relational Pedagogy and Internet Technology* (New York: Peter Lang). Chapter 5, Wolff-Michael Roth’s *Cognitive phenomenology: Tracking the microtonality in/of learning* has not previously been published.

REFERENCES


