What Can We Learn From the Lived Experience of a Student?

The Value of Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Career Education

Susan Forseille
Student Employment Coordinator
Thompson Rivers University
Kamloops, BC
sforseille@tru.ca
250.371.5547
What We Will Explore and Discuss

Reflecting
Collecting
Re-cognizing
Re-thinking
Writing
Reading

The Lived Experience
The Inspiration

- Anesha and Speed Networking Event

- My internal dialogue explained her lack of attendance...
  - Just like other unmotivated students
  - Couldn’t prioritize her time to really do what was important

- Then I thought a little deeper, rationalized, was it fear of success?
I wouldn’t have given it much more thought accept…
...For a Course I Was Taking

On Hermeneutic Phenomenology
with Dr. Norm Friesen
What is Hermeneutic Phenomenology?

- Qualitative research that is inquiry based
- The study, reflection, and writing of lived experience
- Transforms lived experiences into textual expressions of essence
- …before we conceptualize it, categorize or reflect on it – pre explanation
- A reflective awareness that …
  - raises questions,
  - gathers data,
  - describes phenomenon and
  - conducts textual interpretations
- All in a very thoughtful way!
It also...

- Edifies personal insight
- Contributes to one’s ability to act toward others with tact
- Encourages attentive awareness to the details and at times seemingly trivial aspects to everyday life, especially what we often take for granted
- It is the opening up and keeping open of possibilities – until that which is put to question begins to reveal something of its essential nature
Phenomenological Research Also...

- Seeks to describe experience neutrally and clearly
- Brackets the individual out to more fully enter other persons’ perspective and experience
- Avoids inferences or assumptions
- Suspends judgments and shuns generalizations and superficial explanations
- Avoids taxonomic concepts, abstracting theories and empirical analysis
- Kind of like an onion – stripping past the layers
For Example:

- What is the difference between these two questions:
  - How do students learn to write a resume?
  - What is the lived experience of writing a resume with a student?
More Examples to Consider

- With a partner read the two statements and determine which one is a phenomenological question.

- Be prepared to discuss with group.

- “A phenomenological question teaches the reader to wonder, to question deeply the very thing that is being questioned by the question.” (van Manen p. 44)
Want to Dig a Little Deeper?

Let's look at investigating, reflecting and writing...
How to Investigate the Experience

- Where do we find, gather/collect, lived-experience material?
  - Tracing etymological origins
  - Searching ideomatic phrases
  - Experiential description(s) from self and others
    - Stories, anecdotes, recollections
    - Interviewing, observing
    - Literature, biographies, diaries, journals, logs
  - … and of course through phenomenological writings
Followed by the Reflection

- Analyzing (hermeneutic)
- Focus on particular example or incident
- Look for what stands out, what is vivid
- Remember to avoid possible casual explanations, generalizations, and abstract interpretation
Reflection Continued

- Is never simple or one dimensional

- Is not a rule-bound process, but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning or **mining** meaning

- A process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure

- Reflectively analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of that experience

  (Structures of meanings can be described as themes)
A main objective of phenomenological research is writing
  ◦ Writing and reading is how we sustain a conversational relation, a discourse

Helps expose the deep truth

Often the anecdote is used in phenomenological writing

Is a device “for making comprehensible the phenomenon of conversational relations”

Writing tip: Avoid fanciful and flowery writing – very tempting!
How Writing Mediates Reflection

- The combination of reading and writing enhances or creates a deeper level of consciousness
- Expands our insight
- Writing isn’t supplemental it is intertwined – the combination generates a quality of insight
- “Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalized what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things in the world.” (van Manen p.125)
- Creates a reflective cognitive stance
- To write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one’s own depth

“Writing teaches us what we know, and in what way we know what we know.” (van Manen p.127)
Phenomenology in Action

The Lived Experience

Collecting
Reflecting and re-reflecting
Re-thiking
Re-cognizing
Writing and re-writing
Reading and re-reading
The Rest of the Story

- I made assumptions on why Anesha didn’t attend the event (unmotivated, prioritizing challenges, fear of success…)

- Utilizing phenomenological strategies to stay as close to the lived experience as possible
  - Explored the whole experience to the fullest
  - Started at the beginning
  - Silence, patience and prompting worked well

- When conversation turned to generalizations I guided it back to the concrete experience
A Deeper Understanding

- Understanding Anesha’s lived experience better

- A deeper and richer complexity to the question of students’ engagement in preparing for their careers during university

- Illustrates a tension between our generalizations and students’ life world

- Anesha’s experience, in her words
Discussion

- What are your thoughts on Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a way of acquiring insight into student and employee motivation – specifically as it relates to career action (or lack of).
Sources


- www.Phenomenologyonline.com
  - An excellent resource with comprehensive resources
  - Max van Manen started the website (U of A)
Favorite Quotes from van Manen’s Book

- “A real understanding of phenomenology can only be accomplished by actively doing it.” (8)

- “Not a problem in need of a solution but a mystery in need of evocative comprehension.” (51)

- “The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience in the context of the whole of human experience.” (62)

- “Phenomenology tries to penetrate the layers of meaning of the concrete by tilling and turning the soil of daily existence.” (119)

- A carefully cultivated thoughtfulness (131)

- “The problem is that our ‘common sense’ pre-understanding, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question.” (46)