

PHENOMENOLOGY: Discovering New Meanings of Pedagogy within the Lived Experience

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Introduction

There exists a growing body of literature calling for educational change to meet the needs of the knowledge society. The integral role of teachers in this endeavour is also acknowledged. (Crowther, 2001; Cuttance, 2001; Drucker, 1994; Hargreaves A, 1994; Hargreaves D., 1999; Istance, 2001; Van Manen, 2002) The findings of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study [QSRLS] (2001) concur with this body of literature, calling for change in teacher pedagogy to enhance learning outcomes deemed necessary for the knowledge society.

Education Queensland has responded by initiating the Productive Pedagogies - a theoretical framework for critical reflection of teacher pedagogy. All teachers in Queensland State schools are faced with the challenge of reviewing their current practice.

The methodology of phenomenological inquiry is a way, for teachers to find new meaning in their pedagogy. It empowers teachers to make decisions about personal pedagogical change, as they discover new meaning of elements of their pedagogy. These elements present themselves as phenomena in the lived experience of the teacher in the classroom.

This paper will present the work being done at Sandy Flat State School, situated in an island community north of Brisbane, in response to Education Queensland frameworks and initiatives, specifically in the area of pedagogy.

Background

Like all state schools, Sandy Flat S.S. is developing the pedagogy component of its Curriculum Planning document. To this end, all teaching staff participated in the initial two modules of the Productive Pedagogies. All staff were then invited to participate in the following three modules, sixteen out of twenty-five responded.

Sandy Flat has commenced the process of developing a Shared School Pedagogy, where teachers collectively examine their successful practice to produce shared pedagogical principles. Throughout this process [ongoing], teachers are challenged to examine their values, beliefs and mental models of pedagogy both personally as teachers and then as members of the teaching staff at Sandy Flat.

Participation in the Productive Pedagogies and the process for developing shared school pedagogy has also oriented teachers towards their practice in their classroom. Despite this engagement however, there was no evidence to suggest that teachers were engaging in the desired critical reflection. Pedagogy as a notion was still 'out there' - the workshop situation was safe, there had been no call for true 'in here' engagement.

To meet the challenge of pedagogical growth, a methodology was sought that would support teachers to explore and interrogate their pedagogy - to truly critically reflect.

It was decided to test out the methodology of phenomenological inquiry within a learning circle facilitated by the Curriculum Coordinator who was also the facilitator for the Productive Pedagogies. The work of the learning circle would be evaluated to determine if the methodology had merit for inclusion in the Pedagogy component of the Whole School Curriculum Plan, for implementation in 2003.

To fully understand how phenomenological inquiry was used in the learning circle, a brief overview of phenomenology, its essential elements and phenomenological inquiry is necessary.

Phenomenology

"And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And to know the place for the first time" T.S. Elliot (cited in Yancey, 2001)

Phenomenology is the descriptive methodology of human science, seeking to explore and describe phenomena as they present themselves in the lived world in order to find the meaning of the phenomena for itself. It has its origins in philosophy. It is a discovery-oriented method where the observer needs to have an attitude of openness to let the unexpected meanings emerge. (Giorgi, 1997) It should be made explicit at the outset that phenomenology deals with persons as opposed to subjects. A person is a whole being, complete with past experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values. They live in a world of experience, replete with both cultural and social influence (Willis, 2001; Van Manen, 1990; Caelli, 2000).

Phenomenology seeks to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon by peeling back the various layers of moral, ethical, social and cultural influence a person encounters in their lifeworld. Phenomenology does not produce new information but rather appropriates and interprets a meaning already implicit to lived experience as its truth (Burch, 1989).

Phenomenologists seek to find the first meaning of phenomena within lived experience, pre-reflective of external influences.

"Phenomenology must describe what is given to us in immediate experience without being obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions." (1997, Van Manen, p.184)

Essential Elements of Phenomenology

Lifeworld - This is the everyday world we live in with all its' taken-for-granted attitude. This is the world of lived experience. Professor Max Van Manen, a world leader in human science research methods (1997, p.182) quotes from Husserl's (philosopher 1859-1938) last writing

to describe the lifeworld as "the world of immediate experience", the world as "already there" and "pre-given".

The lifeworld is the world as lived by a person, a whole being, complete with worldview, relations and experiences. It is within the lifeworld that the person has the lived experience.

The Lived Experience - The lived experience is that which is lived by a person at a given time, in a given place. It is pragmatic and implicates the totality of life. It's already there and is part of our awareness. Van Manen (1997) quotes Dilthey,

A lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have reflexive awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. Only in thought does it become objective. (p. 35)

Lived experience within the lifeworld lies at the very heart of phenomenology, without it there would not be phenomena to investigate and interrogate.

Max van Manen (1997) in his book, *Researching The Lived Experience*, states

"Lived experience is the starting point and the end point of phenomenological research." (p. 36) Elsewhere, he refers to what Bollnow, the German philosopher, calls "the phenomenological nod", where the reader of phenomenological text as it were nods in agreement with the essence of the lived experience as described from within the lifeworld of others

Consciousness - In his paper, *The Theory, Practice and Evaluation of the Phenomenological Method as a Qualitative Research Procedure*, Giorgi (1997) states that those things that present themselves in the lived world, need to be part of the consciousness of a person, for them to be spoken of or referred to. Their presence is acknowledged by consciousness. Without being conscious of the presence of a thing, it cannot be part of the lifeworld of a person.

In phenomenology, to explore a given phenomenon in the lifeworld is to explore it first as it is presented to the consciousness of a person, within the context of the lifeworld. The fundamental structure of consciousness is intentional.

Intentionality - Van Manen (1997) defines intentionality as the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world. To further define, he quotes Merleau-Ponty(1964) "the world is revealed to us ready-made and already there".

All thinking is always about something. All doing is always doing something. There is always an object and a subject and these are inextricably linked. All human activity is always oriented. The subject and object of consciousness are related and not distinct.

If a person is emotional (object) then they are emotional about something (subject).

Giorgi (1997) states "the classical way of stating the intentional relation is by noting that to be in a state of desire implies that something is desired."

The orientation to intentionality however, is not always conscious. Intentionality is only available to consciousness upon retrospective reflection.

Reduction - Merleau-Ponty referred to reductions in thinking to facilitate this reflection on phenomena in the lived world. '...to return to the world as lived, in an enriched and deepened fashion.' (Van Manen, 1997).

Van Manen (1997), drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, suggests a number of stages of reduction to discover the essential pre-theoretical understanding of a phenomenon.

1. Awakening a sense of wonder and amazement in the world
2. Overcoming one's subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations or expectations
3. To strip away the theories or scientific conceptions and themes which overlay the object of study
4. See past the particularity of the lived experience to discover the universal essence of lived meaning.

By reduction, the phenomenological inquirer seeks to determine the essence of the phenomena. These steps could become guideposts to the reflective practice of the observer.

Essence - In phenomenology the essence of a thing is its essential meaning before social and cultural meanings are attached to it. It is the seeking of the essence, the true being, of the "things for themselves" as opposed to how they are experienced in the lifeworld. Van Manen (1997) defines essence as that which makes a thing what it is.

To discover the essence of a thing the inquirer explores the *whatness*, consciously reducing reflective thought. It asks first and foremost, *what is it like?* and after that *what is it like for me in my world?*

As we then explore the lived experience within the lifeworld, bringing the phenomenon to consciousness and aware of intentionality, we attempt to reduce reflection beyond the immediate context and aim to discover the essence or *essentialness* of the phenomena. This is the fibre of phenomenology.

What then are the phenomena that teachers are to explore in order to enhance their pedagogy? Are they the elements of the Productive Pedagogies?

Can each teacher bring these elements into their consciousness and reflect on the intentionality of these elements in their classroom practice? Can they articulate their essential meaning? Are teachers explicitly aware of what constitutes their pedagogy in order to critically reflect upon it?

These are the questions that motivated the Curriculum Coordinator to investigate this methodology, so enabling the school to make decisions about an effective Pedagogy plan, responding to the Productive Pedagogies, as a component of Whole School Curriculum Planning.

How can one then apply phenomenology to education and the work of teachers?

Van Manen (1997), applies phenomenology in what he refers to as phenomenological inquiry. This paper draws extensively on his work.

Phenomenological Inquiry

It is not the intention of phenomenological inquiry to mandate the new meaning discovered of a phenomenon as authoritative. Rather, it shows what range of experiences are possible in the world that people [teachers] live, how they can be described and how language has the ability to communicate these experiences to others in their richness.

Van Manen (1997) suggests an elemental methodical structure for hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenological inquiry. These are as follows:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 31)

Within the above structure lie the elements of phenomenological writing, reflective practice and phenomenological meaning, which will now be briefly discussed.

Phenomenological Writing - In phenomenology, to explore is to reflect is to think is to write. To write is to put thought on paper. It is inextricably linked with reflection. It is when the questions and thoughts being asked of the phenomena presented in the lifeworld are assembled on paper, that the human science researcher has opportunity to step back and reflect.

The role of phenomenological writing is to convey meaning in description of phenomena for its own sake. There is no one definitive meaning, discovering the essence of the phenomenon is the ultimate goal. Phenomenological writing has been likened to *falling forward into the darkness*, in that it seeks to communicate the not yet known through deep description of what has been lived as whole being in the lifeworld.

Writing describes the richness of the phenomena within the lived experience. It allows the writer to put form and shape to their thoughts. Giorgi (1997) states, "To describe means to give linguistic expression to the object of any given act precisely as it appears....to communicate to others the objects of consciousness to which one is present, precisely as they are presented."

Writing is both the process and product of phenomenological inquiry. The writer writes to inquire of phenomena in the lived world as well as writing to communicate to others the discoveries resulting from the inquiry. Phenomenological writing has the intent of having us see what we haven't seen before, of *showing* the phenomenon in a new way.

When the lived experiences are brought to consciousness firstly in thought and secondly on paper, the process of reduction, the peeling back of the layers of influence can begin, seeking to discover the first meaning of the lived experience.

Van Manen (1997) suggests:

The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible....[it is] to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviours, intentions and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld . (p 125 & 19)

This is often an arduous process with the words never quite encapsulating the richness of thought. They remain an approximation. Some phenomenologists (e.g. Bollnow, cited in Van Manen, 1996) turn to poetry, using metaphor and imagery to convey the silent meanings that are lost in observational description or paraphrase.

Reflective Practice - Reflective practice is the primary process of any phenomenological inquiry. There are many and varied definitions of reflective practice in the literature. (Ussher, 2001; Loughran, 1996; Reiman, 1999; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Schon, 1991). Not all of these definitions however encapsulate the deep reflection that is integral to phenomenological inquiry. Many concern themselves only with the technical or contextual aspects of a lived experience.

Van Manen (in Zeichner & Tietelbaum, 1982, cited in Griffiths and Tann, 1992) distinguishes three levels of reflection, each one higher than the last and superseding it.

The first is concerned with technical application, the second with the underlying assumptions of action, and the worth of competing educational goals and the third and final one, 'critical reflectivity', with moral and ethical issues related to the social, political and economic conditions of educational practice. (p.77)

There are also others who have derived categories or levels within reflective practice, among them Mezirow (1981), Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Habermas (cited in Griffiths and Tann, 1992) Van Manen explains that reflective practice is more than merely making *pedagogical sense* out of past experiences.

To successfully explore and interrogate a phenomenon, the observer needs to look beyond the initial description, needs to peel back the layers of moral, ethical, social and cultural influence to seek the first meaning of the lived experience.

Phenomenological Meaning - In phenomenology, all lived experience has meaning. Meaning is multi-layered and multi-dimensional. Human science meaning can only be communicated through text, hence the phenomenological writing. Through reflection, the inquirer comes to distinguish structures within the lived experience, as communicated through the writing, and goes about their interpretation. These experiential structures are also referred to as themes, quite different however to the 'themes' of qualitative research that are often analysed on unambiguous and fairly mechanical application of frequency counts or coding of terms in transcripts.

Making something of a text or lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure - grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning.....Phenomenological themes may be understood as structures of experience. (Van Manen, 1997:79)

Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning. It is at best a simplification, a form of capturing the phenomenon trying to be understood. In identifying theme the inquirer desires to make sense of the lived experience, to be open to discovering new meanings.

To have pedagogical understanding of the themes of the lived experience allows the inquirer to be practically responsive to it. For example, in discovering meaning of the theme of self-direction in the lived experience of the integrated learning lesson, the inquirer [teacher] is able to pedagogically respond in his/her present lifeworld [classroom].

Pedagogy is multi-dimensional. Van Manen (1997) suggests the meaning of pedagogy cannot ever be grasped in one definition. It is a practical affair, embedded in the lived experiences of both teacher and student in their lifeworlds. It is found not so much in observational experiences but in the experience of its presence in real life situations.

Pedagogy concerns itself with making decisions about what is appropriate or not appropriate for the educational nurture of the individual child. It is relational.

PEDAGOGY: Another meaning from another place

Pedagogy in Western Europe has a long tradition, dating back over one hundred years. Van Manen (1994) states:

Pedagogy as a form of inquiry, implies that one has a relational knowledge of children, that one 'understands' children and youths: how young people experience things, what they think about, how they look at the world, what they do, and, most importantly, how each child is a unique person. A teacher who does not understand the inner life of a child does not know who it is that he or she is teaching.....a pedagogue is an educator who feels addressed by children, who understands children in a caring way, and who has a personal commitment and interest in children's education and their growth towards mature adulthood. (p.138)

The meaning of pedagogy here encompasses far more than the principles of effective teaching and learning, more than a 'strategy tool-kit'. Van Manen (1991) goes so far as to suggest that it is possible to learn all the techniques [or to know all the Productive Pedagogies] but still remain pedagogically unfit to teach. Further, Van Manen states:

...pedagogy is not just a term used to say the same thing differently. Through the notion of pedagogy we should try to further our understanding of what is essential to the excellence of our educational lives with children. (p.30)

This paper will now turn its attention to the learning circle conducted at Sandy Flat State School. The essential elements of phenomenology and phenomenological inquiry will be explicitly foregrounded in the activities of the learning circle.

Discovering new meanings of Social Support in the lived experience:

THE PEDAGOGY LEARNING CIRCLE

This study examines the extent to which phenomenological inquiry provides teachers with a methodology to facilitate the critical reflection of their pedagogy required of them by the employer, Education Queensland.

Background Understandings of Pedagogy

Pedagogy within the learning circle was understood by the Facilitator to be multi-dimensional and relational. The dimensions of shared school pedagogy, authoritative pedagogy and personal pedagogy were explored. (Andrews, 2002) There was no one definition of pedagogy. The definition of pedagogy in systemic documents was acknowledged, however pedagogy was understood to have a wider meaning as represented in the models below.

There are also elements of authoritative pedagogy, for example the Productive Pedagogies, that teachers have incorporated into their personal pedagogy. Not all that is authoritative,

however is internalised. This is dependent upon alignment with personally held beliefs and values around learning and teaching.

Teachers participating in the learning circle had engaged with the Productive Pedagogies and therefore had an authoritative pedagogy framework to draw on for reflection. They had also individually engaged in the process of developing shared school pedagogy. Thus they also had the beginnings of a school specific framework to work within. Throughout the months of this work, a common language and a shared understanding of pedagogy was developing.

This process mirrors the development of the Dimensional Pedagogy (3-DP) component of the IDEAS process (Crowther, Andrews, Lewis & Dawson, 2001) which has been embraced by over one hundred state schools in Queensland with similar stories of enhanced understanding and capacity for reflection on pedagogy.

The above model however did not provide teachers with a *methodology* for reflection using the frameworks either developed at school or provided systemically.

Model 2: Teacher as whole being reflecting on pedagogy

Evaluation Focus:

Is the methodology of phenomenological inquiry cognitively accessible for classroom teachers?

Is it practical? Will teachers engage with it?

Will teachers be able to peel back the layers of influence? Reduce their thinking to find new meaning?

Would phenomenological inquiry provide a 'way in' for critical reflection of pedagogy?

Could this methodology have wider application beyond the learning circle?

Learning Circle Context:

All teachers that had participated in the Productive Pedagogies were invited by letter to join the learning circle. Of the sixteen teachers, nine expressed interest, six made a commitment.

Those that didn't join were elsewhere committed in the school. They expressed regret. One teacher discontinued very early. The five remaining teachers taught in years two to four.

The learning circle met weekly for 45 minutes during the lunch break, in the Conference Room housed in the Administration block. Teachers were given a notebook to record their writing and a pen with which to write. Though small, the gesture of providing a colourful notebook and coloured pen oriented teachers positively to the forthcoming tasks. They were valued. Writing tasks were completed between meetings.

The Productive Pedagogies modules had been facilitated in Term 3. The circle commenced work in Term 4 and is ongoing. Developing shared school pedagogy also commenced in Term 4 and is also ongoing.

The learning circle facilitator was an active participant in all activities of the circle and was also the insider evaluator. The reported findings are from her perspective.

Methodology: Exploring the Lived Experience

Van Manen's (1997) suggested structure for hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry was adopted. Throughout the stages of the inquiry the Facilitator supported the teachers with both readings and explanations of the elements of phenomenological inquiry in 'user-friendly' terms. It was considered more beneficial to be practically oriented than to have the group members distracted [or turned off] with terminology.

The first stage was to agree on the phenomenon that was of interest to all in the group, something all wondered about. The elements within the dimensions of the Productive Pedagogies were adopted as the themes or 'structures' within the lived experience that were to be explored. Using them as the authoritative framework for our exploration into the lived experience would further the understandings gained by engaging in the Modules.

Each teacher could identify with and share an anecdote of the phenomenon of **social support**. It was situated in the **lifeworld** of all participants. This phenomenon was selected as a positive place to begin exploration of the lived experience.

Situated within the dimension of Supportive Classroom Environments, this element aligned with a developing platform of the Shared School Pedagogy - 'risk taking in a safe and secure environment'.

What was social support? What did it personally mean to be socially supported?

What did it look like? Feel like? What was it like for me?

Did it mean the same for teachers and students?

Each teacher could identify with and share an anecdote of this phenomenon. It was situated in the **lifeworld** of all participants. This interrogation was quite different to identifying and knowing an element by definition as had been the experience of the Productive Pedagogies modules.

Secondly, teachers wrote of a **lived experience** when they either felt supported in their learning or not supported. This was a personal description. While teachers could not describe support as experienced by their students [only their students could describe this], they could relate to their own lived experience. Teachers were encouraged to make the

narrative rich with as many of the feelings and perceptions that they experienced at the time. They were to bring the notion of support into **consciousness**. To **intentionally** recall the event of being either supported or not in a learning situation. They were to answer *What did support mean for me?* This was the phenomenological writing particular to this methodology.

As teachers returned to the Learning Circle, the lived experiences were shared. It was time to **reflect**, to engage in the **process of reduction**. *How much of this lived experience had to do with the contextual aspects (time, place, people, emotions), how much with prior knowledge of theories of learning and finally how much did it have to do with beliefs and values personally held?* This was the third stage in our inquiry process.

Finally, the **essence** of the lived experience, the new meaning previously tacit, was discovered. The phenomenological meaning referred to previously in this paper had been found in these narratives.

How did these newly discovered meanings of support impact on personal pedagogy?

Teachers again returned to their lived experience only this time within the lifeworld of their current classroom. They chose either a student or an incident / conversation / event with a student (what Van Manen refers to as pedagogical moments) to again describe the lived experience, producing a rich text. The process of sharing, reflective reduction and finding the essence of the phenomenon of support within the lived experience was repeated.

These meanings were compared with those of our previous inquiry.

This second inquiry was directly related to personal pedagogy and implications were explored.

Finally, teachers were to synthesise their two lived experiences to produce a **phenomenological text** to communicate to others the meaning of support for a learner. This was to be a text rich in metaphor and imagery to communicate the feelings of support that often cannot be conveyed in a retelling.

Findings: Discovering new meaning within the lived experience.

Findings were drawn from narratives of the lived experiences produced in the learning circle, facilitator / evaluator observational notes, survey completed by participating teachers and literature sources.

In keeping with the focus of the evaluation, findings will be organised by the following:

- Teacher engagement;
- Reflective practice;
- A 'way in' for critical reflection of pedagogy.

Teacher Engagement

Motivation to join the Learning Circle was significant with nine of the group of sixteen [Productive Pedagogies Modules] expressing intent to join. Nine would have been a large group given the time constraints we were working within, so the final five teachers plus facilitator made for a workable group of six. These teachers were keen to engage in new

learning. They had never heard of phenomenology or phenomenological inquiry. The decision was made after the first two sessions to keep the learning circle within the lifeworld of the school [practical] as opposed to the university [academic]. There was a tension for the facilitator as evidenced in these recorded observations:

[following two sessions where teachers had received readings on the 'Language of Pedagogy' and 'Reflective practice of Lived Experience' - one reading per session]

"Too heavy - I'm struggling - too theoretical - I thought this was going to be practical and related to my classroom". Open, honest sharing at the beginning of our circle today. Three of the five are not feeling comfortable. When I reassured them that today we would talk and share and find meanings in our descriptions of lived experiences, there was a sense of relief. This was really important feedback for meThe dilemma is - to what extent do teachers need the context and background knowledge concerning relational pedagogy, the lived experience and the methodology they will engage in? Is this what Cuttance (2001) talks about when he says that teaching for the 21st C will need to become more intellectual? (28th October, 2002)

Once focus for the learning circle shifted from the theory to the practical, the engagement of the teachers was positive. While they did need some background knowledge to frame the work to be done, this had to be balanced, remembering that the work of phenomenological inquiry is always practically oriented.

...theory without practice is for geniuses, practice without theory is for fools and rogues, but for the majority of educators the intimate and unbreakable union of both is necessary. (Langeveld quoting Gunning, 1979, cited in Van Manen 1996)

Motivation and engagement remained high.

It continues to amaze me that the teachers in the circle are fully engaged. They take notes, do their weekly tasks and promptly arrive to share. This is Term 4 and we've been talking pedagogy for three months now and they haven't switched off. Could it be because this work is fairly and squarely placed within their circle of influence within their lifeworld? (facilitator observations)

Terminology was not laboured while working through the stages of phenomenological inquiry. Knowing [or not knowing] the definitions of the elements of phenomenology didn't affect the extent to which teachers engaged in the process in these initial stages, or the new meanings that were discovered. All elements were addressed and all stages of phenomenological inquiry were engaged in. The sophistication to which engagement took place was not high given that this was a novice group. This was particularly true regarding the narratives that were written. Were these quality examples of phenomenological text, as described by Giorgi and Van Manen? Probably not, but that was not the intent. The purpose for the learning circle was to ascertain whether this methodology had potential to engage teachers in 'in here' personal reflection.

Teacher comments on the survey completed after week four were unanimously positive.

It is good to share ideas with others. Sometimes we get bogged down in the day-to-day and opportunities to learn from [lived] experience are lost.

Multi-layered meaning was evidenced in the discussion of the learning circle as teachers spoke of pedagogical moments in their unique classrooms. This was no longer distant 'out there' talk, it was intimate 'in here' sharing of students with names in real situations. As teachers shared their lived experiences of social support, it became evident that each participant brought a different dimension of the meaning of social support to the group. Collectively they produced a new set of meanings never before assembled, not because they were revolutionary concepts, but because this unique group of teachers had brought them to consciousness. (see *Table 1*)

Reflective Practice: Reduction

There was initial reticence by some teachers as to whether this learning circle would meet their needs. The reflective demands seemed too academic, not practical for a busy classroom teacher.

At first I felt the learning circle was a little too theoretical but it became more practical.

Indeed, engaging in the reduction process did not come naturally. It was not tacit. It was difficult. There was much thinking and rethinking and asking for confirmation of each other. It required reflection beyond the superficial 'this is what happened and this is what I think'.

When asked whether the peeling away of layers of influence had helped them to find new meaning to the phenomenon [social support], four of the five agreed and one strongly agreed. When asked whether exploring their own lived experience had helped them reflect on its meaning for their students, again three of the five agreed and two strongly agreed.

When asked whether writing the narratives had triggered deep reflection, one teacher commented that she had found it very worthwhile to push through the 'too busy' mentality to produce the narrative text. Having to compose the text, she said, required much deeper thinking than participating in discussion. This had surprised her.

After acknowledging the social-cultural context within which the lived experience took place, teachers could then go beyond that first layer of reflection to consider meanings they were not earlier conscious of. For example, it was only when writing the narrative of her feeling of support as a primary student that one teacher became conscious of the impact of personal sharing to make lessons interesting- this teacher had shared her life experiences with her students. This is known as the element of Narrative in the Productive Pedagogies. While this teacher had engaged with the Productive Pedagogies, it was when this element was brought to consciousness in her lived experience that she could identify it within her personal pedagogy and link it to relationship and social support.

These meanings were present within the non-cognitive knowledge of the teacher, waiting to be drawn into consciousness. (Van Manen, 1997).

Teachers expressed that the intimacy of the small group allowed for deeper levels of sharing and encouraged deeper levels of reflection. Though the reflective process was difficult, and engagement was not at a sophisticated level, it was not without reward. As the group worked at peeling back the layers of influence, new meanings emerged. Each teacher could identify the essence of social support within the narrative of their lived experience. Collectively they formed a new body of meaning not explicit before.

Table 1: Compare and contrast Meanings of Support

Productive Pedagogies definition Social Support	Essence of Social Support as evidenced in the Lived Experience
<p><i>Social support</i> is present in classes where the teacher supports students by conveying high expectations for them all. These expectations include the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. that it is necessary to take risks and try hard to master challenging academic work; b. that all members of the class can learn important knowledge and skills; and c. that a climate of mutual respect among all members of the class contributes to achievement by all. <p>Mutual respect means that students with less skill or proficiency in a subject are treated in ways that continue to encourage them and make their presence valued. If disagreement or conflict develops in the classroom, the teacher helps students resolve it in a constructive way for all concerned.</p>	<p>The following meanings of support were evidenced in the lived experiences of our Learning Circle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be passionate about teaching • To make allowance for individual response • To have respect for children and their capabilities • To be positive • To take time to know and care for the learner as an individual • To trust the abilities of the learner • To encourage the learner to challenge the comfort zone • To make lessons interesting through personal narrative - to share of self • To have a quiet manner - not to yell • To recognise the learners effort and praise the learner indiscriminately • To develop relationship • To challenge • To balance the sensibilities of public and one-on-one relational interactions.

This new meaning was the result of a novice group, a group acknowledging their fledgling skills of phenomenological inquiry, and yet the new meanings discovered had provided a 'way in' to their personal pedagogy. They were able to contemplate which actions/decisions were appropriate for the social support of the child for whom they held pedagogical responsibility.

Time constraints in the learning circle became an issue as the Term progressed and trust developed within the group.

Teachers wanted to share and talk about their lived experiences in their classrooms. One teacher commented that she no longer felt alone with particular concerns about the students for whom she held pedagogical responsibility.

Good to get to know others and feel better about your own experiences as a teacher, when it happens to others also....not alone.

Tends to go too quick, but is best to do at lunch and not after school

Acknowledging that most learning circles run for up to two hours, the forty-five minutes teachers willingly gave in their lunchtime was only half of that. After school or before school

was not possible [too many meetings, too tired] and there were no financial resources to provide teacher release during school time.

It could be argued that given more time, more significant evidence of the depth and breadth of reflection could have been gathered.

A 'way in' for critical reflection of pedagogy

As teachers shared their lived experiences we experienced what Bollnow, the German philosopher, calls "the phenomenological nod". There were nods of agreement with the essence of the lived experience as described from within the lifeworld of another. Sometimes there were gaps - what was the essence for one was not exactly the essence for another - yet they became meaningful as they brought to consciousness other aspects of the meaning of social support for the rest of the group. They were also meaningful because they had come from the personal lived experience of those in a trusted and respected collegial group. One teacher commented,

It is interesting that many ideals [essence] of ours appear to be the same although our lived experiences are not.

There were times of 'wow, that's so true - I've never thought of that'. One teacher, quiet by nature, related in her narrative of support that one of the ways she felt supported was by a quiet gentle manner. The teacher she wrote about had had great impact because he had not yelled, but had respected all children. She shared that yelling jarred her sensibilities even if she wasn't the one being yelled at. This sharing provided a 'way in' for the facilitator to reflect

...I've never considered that the loudness of my voice could be jarring a child in my class. I've always thoughtfully considered the impact of a loud voice on the child it was directed towards but never the bystanders. Is it ever O.K. to yell? Is it ever appropriate? Must keep thinking.....peel back those initial layers of feelings and emotion.....I'm usually loud when I'm stressed or angry.

While not sophisticated our narratives showed the range of experiences that had been lived in the learning circle, and the sharing of the narratives presented the richness of the experience. (Giorgi, 1997)

The conversation in the reflective sessions was rich in that it very much related to individual classrooms and personal experiences as learners. The meanings discovered in the first narratives of support (Table 1) were more descriptive, 'thicker' than the meaning given in the Productive Pedagogies manual. Indeed what these teachers had discovered could not be observed by visiting classrooms. These meanings had been integrated into their pedagogy. They had been stored as significant, being gleaned from their lived experience with esteemed teachers, and had then been carried for ten to twenty years.

Describing these lived experiences, engaging in narrative writing, provided the 'way in' to their current personal pedagogy. The conversation of the learning circle was around 'what I do in my class for, or in my dealings with, this student'. This was particularly evident in the second lived experience narratives. (see Appendix I)

It is important to reiterate that the meanings discovered were not new as in never existed before, but they were new in that they hadn't been drawn to consciousness before (Burch, 1989). They were meaningful for this group of teachers, in this context, working with their particular students. The meanings were true for the group.

The meanings are not set up as authoritative. The Productive Pedagogies are acknowledged as authoritative pedagogy. When teachers engaged in the Modules however, the definitions and meanings were objects to be moved around on a mix and match matrix, they remained 'out there'.

Developing Shared School Pedagogy had given teachers the opportunity to move a little closer 'in' as they shared their successful practice with colleagues. While all agreed that *risk taking in a safe and secure environment*, was a distinctive aspect of shared pedagogy at Sandy Flat S.S., it nevertheless remained 'out there' for the individual teacher in terms of critical reflection, as the process was collective. It focused on the whole school as opposed to the individual.

In going to the lived experience, within the teacher's lifeworld, the element of social support became lived. It moved from 'out there' to 'in here', it was now part of the teacher, their student(s) and their classroom. They could now reflect deeply on their practice. As they did so, teachers came to develop a broader understanding of pedagogy. The integral role of relationship was found in each narrative, embedded in the meanings of support. Pedagogy was relational. All aspects of the teacher, as whole being in their lifeworld, had impact on their pedagogy. (see *Appendix II*)

Implications for the Future

Sandy Flat State School

The Pedagogy learning circle is a work-in-progress. The teachers involved have expressed a desire to continue with the process into 2003. They are keen to continue to use the methodology of phenomenological inquiry to further reflect on the remaining elements of the Productive Pedagogies. Those teachers who could not participate this Term have expressed desire to join the learning circle next year.

New insights and newly discovered meanings for elements of pedagogy, within the lived experience of teachers at Sandy Flat, will be shared with teacher colleagues.

The Leadership Team of Sandy Flat S.S. have been encouraged by both the level of commitment and the engagement of teachers with this methodology. The findings of this first learning circle align with research from the fields of psychology and health sciences, particularly nursing, (Giorgi, 1997; Caelli, 2000; Barritt L., Beekman T., Bleeker H. & Mulderij K. 1983), supporting the notion that phenomenology provides a 'way in' for teachers to reflect on their pedagogy.

Education Queensland

As a school, Sandy Flat S.S. now has a methodology to offer it's staff to facilitate critical reflection. Critical reflection of pedagogy is embedded within the systemic documents (QSE 2010, Strategic Plan 2001-2005, Curriculum Framework: Years 1-10, Destination 2010). All teachers are called upon to reflect upon their pedagogy in determining whether it is appropriate to deliver the learning outcomes necessary for the knowledge society. Phenomenology *may* be a way for other teachers in other schools to also find a 'way in' to their personal pedagogy. The writings that are the product of phenomenological inquiry may provide a new knowing for other teachers, they may produce the 'nod' that triggers reflection on aspects of personal pedagogy that had previously lay dormant in the sub-conscious. Aspects of pedagogy could be brought to consciousness through them. While not all teachers will engage in researching their lived experience, the meanings resulting from these endeavours would bring new meanings to a wider audience.

Conclusion

Phenomenology and the process of phenomenological inquiry will not suit all teachers. It will not provide the answers for the pedagogical growth of the teaching profession. It is never the intention of phenomenology to provide the answers. It cannot generate systemic change. What it can do however is provide access for teachers into their lived experience as teachers in living classrooms with living children and young people. It can provide a means to critically reflect on what is done and not done in meeting the educational needs of those children and young people.

In exploring the lived experience, teachers may bring new meaning into the system, which was previously tacit. It has been suggested that it would give teaching and learning a new meaning and therefore enhance teacher professionalism.

It may not make a difference for all the forty thousand teachers in Queensland, but it has certainly made a difference for six, and for those six they now have a 'way in'. A 'way in' to the personal pedagogy that allows us to respond to the unique - the unique child, the unique self, the unique classroom. It's a little like the man walking along the shore.....

Two people are walking along the ocean shore when they notice a strange phenomenon. Scores of starfish everywhere have washed up along the sandy beach. Many are dead already, suffocated on the mucky sands under the blistering sun. Others are still pushing themselves up with their arms from the searing sands to postpone a sure death. "An awful sight" the one says, "but that is nature". Meanwhile the companion has bent down and carefully examines one particular starfish and lifts it from the sand. "What are you doing?" asks the first person. "Don't you see that doing this does not matter? Helping one won't make a difference!"

"It matters to this one," the companion simply says, and continues to carry the starfish back to the ocean waters. (Van Manen, 2002 p. 8-9)

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APPENDIX I

A Supportive Moment - within a Critical Episode.

A Lived Experience with Mace (Yr 6).

Mace runs through my Time Out duty. I call him back - "Is this O.K.? What's going on?" He says he's being chased and bullied. Two other boys arrive with a counter tale. I invite Mace to stay with me for a time and then direct him to the oval within eye-shot of the duty teacher. My Time Out duty concludes. I have another student to question about kicking Year 1 lunchboxes around. On the way I meet Mace again.....

"Mace, how did the rest of lunch go?" He ignores me. "Mace..?" No response. He charges into a classroom - I pursue to see Mace hurling a full tidy tray out of the window. He has the second tray in his hands. I reach out to restrain him - he upends the tray onto the floor. I now have a firm grip on Mace's wrist and 'lead' him out of the classroom. Mace is crying. He is angry, distressed and yelling for me to let him go. He is squirming to be released.

I explain to Mace that until he can show me that he is no longer a danger to either himself or others, I will continue to restrain him. My talk is firm. I too am annoyed, probably closer to angry - if he had stopped and talked to me when I asked him to all of this may have been avoided.

I know intrinsically that yelling at Mace will do no good - it will only exacerbate the situation. I talk calmly but firmly.

Within minutes, Mace and I are negotiating the release of his wrist. Do I trust him enough? Is there any relationship between us? More importantly does he trust me? He doesn't know me! I take a gamble.....and he does a runner!!

It takes 15 minutes to find Mace again - 5 staff looking - mobiles busy!

Mace has sought sanctuary in the Jnr Boys toilet block. I go to the entry. If Mace is at the taps he will see me. I choose not to enter - I respect his 'safe place'. The talking begins. I reason with Mace, he needs to come to the Office (that's where I work and besides the toilets smell!). What he has done is not O.K., we can't forget it, however he does have his story to tell and I offer him the chance to tell it.

Mace sidles closer to the doorway of the toilets - he's afraid, he's confused, he's still very angry and he doesn't trust me yet.....he has to take a risk.....will she be true to her word?

He eventually comes with me...eventually makes it up the stairs...and sits in one of the lounge chairs in my office. I sit next to him in another chair. He begins to tell and I begin to write. I write it down as he tells it - even if it isn't what others saw - it's his story, his truth and it's important for him to see that I respect that.

It is in this experience that a very new, very fragile relationship is being forged.

Next time Mace has trouble (and he will) we will have a shared experience to fall back on. In allowing Mace to have his truth and respecting it as a part of him, I think I was supporting him in coming to confront the consequences of his actions.

P.S. Davis is SLI 5 and is being harassed and bullied by classmates. A support plan has now been put in place.

Essence following critical reflection: to support [in this lived experience] means to initially suspend judgement. Allowing a frightened, fragile boy to tell his side of the story - to respect his perceptions before judging.

APPENDIX II

[extract from a narrative which describes a difficult one-on-one reading session - Year 4 student]

She's not even concentrating - she keeps looking around and isn't even focussing on the job at hand.

"Come on!" I say, "you're doing well." I began to feel guilty - why was her reading so bad? Hadn't I been working with her enough throughout the year? Am I failing another student here? Should I be teaching at all? What's wrong with me!!!!?

"How about we leave it here?" I said to her in a moment of frustration, impatience and impending sense of guilt.

Unexpectedly she looked at me blankly and then burst into tears! What's all this? Where did this come from? Shouldn't I be the one in tears? I'm the guilty one - not you!

"What's wrong?" I inquire tentatively, selfishly feeling and thinking that I don't really feel like wearing the psychiatrist hat or the relationship counsellor uniform this afternoon.....

In a blubbering voice she told me of her woes involving living away from home and what had been going on in her family. I felt as though she probably did crave a little attention but also just needed someone to talk to.

As we spoke I felt myself calm down a little, knowing that I was doing the right thing of just listening and offering advice rather than pushing it all under the mat in order to get the 'important stuff' done.

Essence following critical reflection: to support [in this lived experience] means to take time to know and care for the learner as an individual. To develop relationship.