

## ***Pedagogical relationships: unfolding possibilities***

**Genevieve Noone**

**University of New England**

[gnoone@metz.une.edu.au](mailto:gnoone@metz.une.edu.au)

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*I believe the main aim of education should be to assist children to develop to their full potential: to become 'the best people that they possibly can be' (Neville, personal communication, 13 August 2001). But what is 'the best'? What is our human potential? David Bohm (1996:94) believes that, despite current cynicism and pessimism, 'the human race has great possibilities', and that we need to contemplate what our potential might be. This paper looks at a recent research project in which I studied of the nature of the pedagogical relationships between children and voluntary community members in a primary school. The study aimed to discover the nature of these pedagogical relationships; the possibilities and potential. The study used the philosophy of phenomenology as explicated by Max van Manen (1997) to inform the methodology. Van Manen (1997:12) proposes phenomenological research as an appropriate methodology for studying pedagogical relationships, as it has, as its ultimate aim, 'the fulfilment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are'. The study employed the analytical processes of poeticizing, dramatizing, dialoguing, dwelling, and writing to discover some of the possibilities of these relationships. This paper presents an overview of the methodology of this research, discussing the data it produced and the processes employed in the phenomenological analysis.*

### **introduction**

Research has suggested that the relationships between the teacher and the learner, that is, pedagogical relationships, play an important part in students' learning. As teachers, we often sense this intuitively. Ivan Watson (2002:12), in an analysis of findings of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Resnick et al. 1997) suggests that relationship is 'the fourth R': 'good relationships increase students' "school connectedness" and make them feel better about school'. This in turn has the potential to improve students' learning:

feelings of personal relation between teaching and the learning parties promote study pleasure and motivation (Holmberg 1988:115).

David Pettit's (1980:127) case study of community participation in a suburban school in Melbourne found that both children and community members benefitted from the participation of the community members in the school. He concluded that it is 'the quality of interpersonal relationships that is the key to the school's success'. Margaret Cook (2002:6) recently reported on a program in a rural Victorian secondary school where parents and

volunteers work with Year 9 pupils who have been identified as possibly "at risk". Respondents to her interviews stated such things as: 'They're [the students] more connected to the school'; 'kids who had removed themselves from the education process now want to learn'; and 'you need to have a rapport with kids, be trustworthy'. These statements all support the findings of a study I recently completed and from which much of this paper is drawn. The study was of the relationships between community volunteers and children in a primary school in rural New South Wales. The aim of the study was to explore the nature of these relationships and so discover some of the *possibilities* of them.

At the outset of the study I struggled with finding the best way to do this. How do we discover the nature of the personal relationship between a teacher and a learner? It was only after quite a bit of searching that I decided that using the philosophy of phenomenology to guide my methodology would enable me to gain some insight into the possibilities of these pedagogical relationships. Van Manen (1997:12) describes phenomenology as 'a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life.' To carry out phenomenological research is to collect 'lived experience descriptions' from participants and reflect on these descriptions so as to discover what it is that makes the phenomena what it is, and without which the phenomena would not be what it is. The data collection consisted of observations and interviews. In this paper I want to share with you the story of my struggle to discover the essence of these relationships; how through my engagement with the participants in the study, and with the data that they so generously gave me, I came to use poeticization, dramatization, dwelling, dialoguing and writing as the tools of reflection; and how in each of these processes silence was an important ingredient.

### **poeticization**

The poeticization of the data began with poetic transcription, and evolved into poetic representation of the data.

#### *~ poetic transcription*

Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe (1996:119-121) suggest that all interviews should be transcribed as oral language, as opposed to written language. They argue that the spoken word is a legitimate genre in its own right and, when transcribed, should be done so as to maintain as much as possible the rhythm of the spoken word:

to remove hesitations, repetitions, diversions and false starts, to add punctuation, to impose a line of argument, to standardize grammar, to choose spellings, to decide on the position of capital letters and emphases, to make guesses about the meaning of mumbled words, to delete "extraneous" comments about coffee or the weather [is to be] thoughtlessly patronizing ... (p.120).

The method argued for by Anne Game and Andrew Metcalfe (1996:119-121) presents the interview transcription in its context, as raw data; un-interpreted. They suggest that the researcher uses capital letters only for proper nouns, and inserts new lines for pauses. Transcribed in this way the conversation is able to be read, as it was spoken.

Transcribing the conversations in this way produced transcriptions like the one that follows which is part of my conversation with a community tutor:

*well part of what I enjoy is just that*

*that warm relationship that I feel that I've got with say*

*three ... particularly two ... particularly two I s'pose the two girls*

*you know that I work with*

*oh the fourth boy I work with I've only just started working with  
in the last few weeks*

*so yeah*

*so there's not a lot happening there but I enjoy kind of*

*the warmth of our exchange you know*

*we laugh and and everything together and um*

*and you're just seeing I mean just seeing their skills*

*sort of expanding*

*that's great one of the boys the boy that whom I've been  
working with all*

*from the start of the year*

*he was never he was always sort of fairly sullen in a way or  
just just quiet but there was a bit of a sullen*

*sort of energy about him and he didn't*

*I mean he read*

*but*

*never really talked about what he was reading particularly or  
whatever*

*and lately I mean he's talking he talks about he talks about  
what what he thinks is going to happen next he's talking about  
pictures he's just ... so he's really just to see him really  
engaged in the whole process of reading now*

*and sort of gobbling up books*

*and looking at what titles are available and what he wants to  
read next and*

*you know the fact that he's getting a real buzz because he's  
reading books that now*

*look a bit more*

*they're they're a bit thicker*

*and they look a bit more you know not so much as a like a  
kid's book*

*as the easier ones that he was reading*

*yeah I mean it's a buzz just to see*

*his skills opening out and you know and and we've got a sort  
of warmer relationship now*

*than we had at the start so yeah*

*that's what I enjoy*

The text is not prose, but not strictly poetry. It does, however, use lines to indicate pauses, and, in longer transcriptions, verses to indicate longer breaks. So it has been 'poeticized'.

Other writers also suggest that poeticizing is a more appropriate way to record interview transcriptions. Dennis Tedlock (1983:109) writes:

when people talk, whether as conversants, storytellers, informants, or interviewees, their speech is closer to poetry than it is to sociological prose.

Laurel Richardson (1997:223) also argues that conventional prose may not be the 'most "accurate" (i.e. "valid" and "scientific") way to "report" speech.' She writes that:

poetry acknowledges pauses through the conventions of line breaks, spaces between lines and between stanzas and sections; a poem, therefore, more closely mimics actual speech by building its text upon both sounds and silence.

As I read the poeticized transcripts in my research I had a great sense of just how well they re-presented the lived experiences of the participants and I decided that, if "tidied" up a little bit, they would be a wonderful way to portray, to the reader, the participants' experiences.

*~ poetic re-presentation*

And so began the next step of poetic re-presentation. Ninetta Santoro and her colleagues (2001:196) took their interview transcriptions and re-presented them poetically. They:

cut and pasted sentences from the transcribed conversation - never changing words - but often paring down, omitting phrases and smoothing the text ... [we] tried as much as possible to keep to the intonation and syntactic rhythm of speech.

Applying this process to the data I had been given produced passages such as the following:

*I'm aware of that that what I'm doing is taking place in an  
overall sort of context*

*the school is*

*a network of human relationships*

*that's all it is*

*so I'm in that I'm in that network you know*

*anything that anybody does within that network*

*affects the whole thing*

*and*

*I really strongly believe*

*that if you want people*

*to be the best people that they possibly can be*

*all you have to do is support them*

*that's all you have to do*

*you don't have to tell them what to do*

*you don't have to make them*

*all you have to do is support them*

(a community tutor)

It also produced the following re-presentation of a conversation I had on my final day of observations:

*I've got all this data and I was explaining to [the General Assistant] this morning and he said*

*oh this will be the least interesting part*

*it won't be as exciting as doing the fieldwork*

*and I said well no*

*I said it's like*

*I've got all this data now and I'm going away to see what I've got*

*I go away every week I write up my log and transcribe my interviews but I don't actually have time*

*to sit and think well what have I got ...*

*and he said oh it's like a project he said you know you ... collect all your bits and pieces and it's all in the shed*

*and finally you get to the stage where you can actually do it*

*I said yeah*

*I really like that*

*analogy ...*

*I've been putting all this stuff in the shed*

*and now I'm going to go there*

*and build my project ...*

### **dramatization**

So I went back to my office to reflect on all the data I had been given and "build" my story.

The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something (van Manen 1997:77).

I took my typed up log entries and transcribed interview transcripts and found a seat in a sunny courtyard and read: I read and read and read, expecting and waiting for the important bits to leap out at me; but they didn't! According to van Manen (1997) phenomenological reflection is achieved through writing, but I couldn't imagine where to start writing. I couldn't imagine what I should write. I couldn't imagine myself writing. What was I doing wrong?

#### *incident on the hill*

A few months earlier, as I was walking down a grassy hill between my office and the university café, I had been thinking about how I would "analyze" all the data I was being given. I was picturing in my mind the pages of typed up log entries, and the pages of interview transcripts ...

*I'll have my observations ...*

*and I'll have the transcript of my interview with the community member*

*and I'll have the transcript of my interview with the child*

*and I'll stick them all on a big piece of paper*

*and I'll probably use coloured pencil and I'll underline bits and draw bits and*

*try to ... them all together to understand what the meaning of their relationship is the meaning of the experience for them*

*... I'm picturing this in my mind and ...*

*picturing how I'm going to do this reflection*

*and*

*all of a sudden the pieces of paper stood up and the bodies stepped out of them and I could see a tableau ...*

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*a community member and a child*

*and a person speaking the words from the community member's interview*

*and another person speaking words from the child's interview*

*and a voice saying what I had observed*

*and I thought wow*

*this would be a great way to help me reflect on the data if I can get four people*

*at least four people*

*interested enough to work with me in representing what I saw in the classroom and what the community members and children have told me*

As the conversations had been transcribed poetically, to "poeticize" and "dramatize" them required only selecting which parts to use; selecting which parts of my log to insert, and where; and finding "voices" to read them, and "bodies" to enact them (in tableau). At the rehearsals, as the performers read the words of the children and community members, and the words from my log, the experience came alive again for me. I was able to see and hear for the first time another representation of the data. It took surprisingly little time for my fellow performers and I to rehearse the performances. We simply read the transcripts as recorded. And the tableaux were easily decided upon from the text as it was spoken.

I presented two seminars where the poeticized and dramatized data was performed. At the first of these seminars my fellow performers and I performed two spoken pieces: two poeticized pieces, presented as "voices". At the second seminar, the second of the pieces was presented with the tableaux, just as I had envisioned when walking down that grassy hill several months before. After the second performance I had a feeling of accomplishment. It had been done. I had presented my research. Bill Green and Adrian Kiernander (2001:126) suggest that, in the Creative Arts, research conclusions can be 'realised in the form of a live performance or other theatrical events, possibly including workshop processes or rehearsals, where these end-products are the result of the investigation and exploration.' My experience, and the responses of the participants at both of the performances, suggest to me that performance could also be a conclusion for research in fields other than the Creative Arts. Despite this "feeling" of accomplishment, I knew that it was not yet done. I had to write the story.

## dwelling

At the second of the performances one of the participants (a member of the audience) responded to the performance by introducing the notion of *dwelling*. He said that to dwell is to:

interrupt and arrest the movement through data ...

to stop it and dwell in the data

... a different thing from

other constructions of reflection

you're not after explanation you're after illumination

it's actually not

writing anymore ...

it's more material ... being inside

that takes longer

so there's different

kinds of existential experiences going on here

involving different kinds of research

dwelling is a house

so you inhabit it

but it's also to stay

to linger

don't rush through and consume things

because you're dwelling and you're allowing the unconscious and other kinds of forms of knowing to be part of your apprehension

(Bill Green, personal communication October 2001)

He said that his experience of the performance was that of time being stopped, and the audience being able to dwell in the moment.

Another participant joined the discussion, saying:

dwelling has

no start or finish

it's a place that you inhabit almost like a living between circumstance

(Cynthia à Beckett, personal communication October 2001)

Shortly after the performances I spent several weeks in a house out of town; a quiet retreat where I could  *dwell*  in the data. I hadn't been able to locate any literature on "dwelling" however  *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*  (1976:323) suggests that 'to dwell' is to 'keep one's attention fixed ...  *(up) on*  subject'; so this is what I did. And I wrote.

On returning from my retreat I met with an interested colleague to discuss how the research was progressing. In describing to her the process I was involved in I discovered what it was that dwelling was:

*I've been out of town for two weeks*

*writing*

*dwelling*

*what I do is*

*I read my notes*

*and the interview transcripts*

*and I just sit there*

*sort of looking at the words but not really*

*my mind is sort of blank*

*not thinking*

*just being*

*and I just let the words sink into me*

*then after a while*

*I start to write*

*and I am always amazed at the words that come out*

*where did they come from*

*from deep inside me*

*not my thoughts on what I've read*

*but the response of my being*

*to their being*

*to the you*

*and to the I*

## **dialoguing**

As already evident, conversing (dialoguing) with colleagues and friends had become an important part of my data analysis. David Bohm (1985:175) suggests that, when people are dialoguing freely with each other, they are developing a common meaning, and they are 'participating in this pool of common meaning which is capable of constant development and change.' He sees dialogue as one way for human beings to discover what he calls *the unlimited*; that which we can be (Bohm 1996:94). These conversations show how I was able to come to a greater understanding of the lived experience descriptions. Following is a piece of text which begins with a quote from an interview with a child. It is followed by my reflection (upon dwelling on the child's words), a colleague's comment on reading my reflection, and my reflection on her comments:

~

*"when I get words right he goes like that" [he motions Neville's tapping-him-on-the-arm movement]*

the moment

when Neville gently slaps the boy's arm

one person touching another

the inbetween disappears

as they become one

just for a moment

sharing their joys

the joy of learning

and the joy of being part of that learning

a flower and its stake

I don't think that the inbetween disappears. I think it expands and they become totally immersed ... Neville and Michael have created an expanding space of the inbetween which frees them from their current circumstances.

They are in relation to one another but still self and other ... (Cynthia à Beckett, personal communication, December 2001)

Physically the inbetween disappears, but spiritually the inbetween grows so as it appears to encompass them. They remain separate, but they create a togetherness; another state, an extra dimension ...

~

Next is a response from another colleague to the "voices" performance:

that's right that's one of the joys of ...

I haven't been a teacher but I've been I've done plenty of the going in being you know community member

and it's I guess it's because you have some authority in the eyes of the school that you're a parent you're not a trainee teacher

but they don't tend to interfere with how you're relating with the kids

and the children yeah I mean that that was the joy of it when the children can actually

be themselves and you can be yourself too it's it's wonderful

My reflection on the data was not a solitary process. It involved conversations with many colleagues and friends: conversations which allowed me to hear my own thoughts; which challenged me; and which, at times, took my ideas and gave them wings.

### **writing**

However, I still had to write. Van Manen (1997:7) talks about writing as part of the reflection process. He says that 'phenomenology is fundamentally a writing activity. Research and writing are aspects of one process.' Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe (1996) discuss the connection between reading, writing, thinking and knowing; how new understandings can be achieved through the reading/writing process:

once the connection between thought and writing is recognized ... then we write not to present a Truth but to discover how we think (Game & Metcalfe 1996:95).

But I was stuck. How did one write up a performance, dwellings, and conversations? I found myself speaking on the phone, to a friend who is both a writer and a maker of wooden furniture. He enquired as to how my writing was going. He said that he found writing to be just like making wooden furniture:

A couple of days later I received a letter from him in the mail which said:

and there are really long periods where nothing seems to be happening

then suddenly there's *something*

so for ages there are these pieces of wood which you cut and tress and thickness and measure and shape and cut and chisel and drill

and you have them stacked in a little pile that you stack and restack over and over

and then one day you put them together and you have your piece before you

in shape

but then you have to sand and fiddle and shape and add bits and sand and glue together and varnish and add handles and hinges and other bits

then at last you have your work

but there's long long periods when nothing much seems to happen

(David Curtis, personal communication, March 2002)

And so I began writing. My research log at the time reveals how frustrating I found the process:

*I have to discover the ending: discover the essence of the relationships. And part of the process is writing, but then I have this need to order the writing so as it points to something - but something that is as yet unknown to me ... So I keep writing, and reordering, cutting, pasting, shuffling, and as I cut, paste and shuffle I get glimpses of what the essence might be, and so I write some more, cut, paste and shuffle, and another aspect of the essence comes into focus - so I write some more; and cut, paste and shuffle ...*

*I just have to trust the process ... trust that this process will eventually reveal the essence in all its complexity; in all its simplicity - and then finally I will know how to order the story: which bits of narrative are needed and where. Eventually the poetry and prose, the*

*participants' words, other writers' words, and my words, will come together as "the story"... trust!*

## **silence**

According to David Bohm (1996:94) silence is essential in the process of coming to understand the *unlimited*, the unknown; in discovering possibilities and human potential. He suggests that what we need is 'a place somewhere ... an empty space of some sort - an empty space of time or place, where there is nothing occupying you'. Max van Manen (1997:114) describes this type of silence as '*ontological silence*, the silence of Being or Life itself ... moments of greatest and most fulfilling insight or meaningful experience.' In his article on silence Otto Bollnow (1982:45) describes how a good conversation 'lapses into silence, in the hope that it will be taken up again later and yet with a sense of satisfaction ...' He also suggests that:

Every poem, though it is able to put into words something previously unsaid so that others may comprehend it, leaves a remainder unsaid ... what is left unsaid lingers on in the ears in a kind of silence akin to conversation (p.47).

In each part of the reflection and analyzing process, silence played an important role: silent places for thinking; silences in the performances; the silence of thought in dwelling; silent pauses in conversations; silences in writing, when no words come. I learnt to value these silences: to quieten the frustrations and let myself *be* in the silence.

## **conclusion**

I chose to reflect on the data through poeticization and dramatization because, after much contemplation, I found it the only way for me to find the clues that would point to the essence of the relationships between the community members and the children. This led to dwelling and dialoguing, and finally to writing. Through these processes the possibilities of the relationships *unfolded*. David Bohm (1996:89) suggests that:

ultimately the nature of all the world is that it is all mutual participation ... the ground to everything is the *en-folded*, and the *un-folded* is just a display, or a show of the enfolded.

What the study unfolded was that the community volunteers saw their personal relationships with the children they worked with in the school as integral to the learning and teaching processes they were involved in. The volunteers worked within structured programs, but within those programs they were free to develop the relationships that they thought were best for the children and the children's learning. Having the freedom to develop the relationships that they saw best, the community members spent time talking and listening to the pupils; building trust and being with them. The relationships were about children having the opportunity to build relationships with other members of the community; about how children experience a "public institution". They were about the children's personal well-being. The school staff recognized the 'tangible and ... accountable transfer of skills', but also valued greatly 'the intangible effects of building relationships' (Spence 2001:73). The processes of poeticizing, dramatizing, dwelling, dialoguing, and writing, enabled me to *unfold* the lived experiences of the participants, and see into the relationships that the community members and children had developed. If pedagogical relationships are a vital part of students' learning then we need to continue to study these relationships. Over the years I have noticed that, as society's values change, so too are the ways in which adults relate to children changing. If the relationships between teachers and children change as society changes then we need to continue to study these relationships to discover what it is

about these relationships that motivate and encourage the learner to learn; and so help the learner, and the teacher, to discover their potential.

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