



## From “The Things Themselves” to a “Feeling of Understanding”: Finding Different Voices in Phenomenological Research

by Dr Peter Willis

*This paper explores some of the ways in which phenomenological approaches have been linked to contemporary social science inquiry into human ways of knowing and learning in the fields of education and nursing research. It then looks at four contemporary approaches which draw on phenomenology namely: distinguishing imaginal from rational/logical knowing as an alternative and complementary mode of knowing; using ‘arts based’ or ‘expressive’ approaches to inquiry; developing hermeneutic text making to present research findings and using heuristics in a cyclical approach to understanding forms of human experience. The suggestion is that these approaches could be enriched and deepened by a more explicit exploration of phenomenological approaches and that conversely, some of forms of phenomenological research might be enriched by the use of these approaches.*

*We explain nature but human life we must understand (Dilthey)*

### Introduction

This is a brief exploration of the growth in the marriage between phenomenology and contemporary forms of qualitative and interpretative research. It explores some of ways phenomenology has mutated to meet various research needs in different disciplines. Phenomenology has continued to interest academics in philosophy and psychology and has seen developments in its use in social sciences particularly in education and nursing.

In philosophy, a research group led by Lester Embree at Florida Atlantic University collaborated over the Encyclopedia of Phenomenology (Embree, 1997). One of Embree's collaborators, Dermot Moran, a philosopher from University College Dublin, has

just produced a comprehensive introduction to phenomenology which updates Spiegelberg's opus which first appeared in English in 1957 and the third edition of which was published in 1994. A more modest volume has come from Sokolowski (2000) from the Catholic University of America. These ‘overview’ texts have been carefully reviewed by Paul Macdonald (2001) who largely celebrates Moran's work but is somewhat critical of Sokolowski's introductory text.

In psychology, Duquesne university in Pennsylvania lead by Giorgi and his colleagues published four volumes of Studies from 1971 to 1983. Research in the psychological arena has also been pursued by Valle and Halling at the University of Seattle whose large collection 'Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology' (1989) is widely cited.

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In the field of education phenomenological researchers at the University of Alberta inspired by Max van Manen and his development of hermeneutic phenomenology have published the journal 'Phenomenology and Pedagogy' which has specific reference to schooling. More recently, van Manen has extended his research and writing to nursing. Patricia Benner was a student of Hubert Dreyfus who is a University of Berkeley philosophy professor with internationally acknowledged expertise in Phenomenology. She has lead nursing researchers into various applications of phenomenology and to some controversy surrounding this. Benner edited a comprehensive overview of phenomenology and its relation to nursing research in 1994.

### **The Empathetic / Intuiting Divide**

Phenomenology has always had many versions. It is not so much a particular method as a particular approach which was adopted and subsequently modified by a series of philosophers and writers, of whom Husserl, is usually regarded as a major early force that gave the movement impetus and focus. These writers wanted to reaffirm and describe their 'being in the world' as an alternative way to human knowledge, rather than objectification of so-called positivist science. Paul Ricoeur (1978, p. 1214) referred to phenomenological research as 'the descriptive study of the essential features of experience taken as a whole' and a little later, stated that it 'has always been an investigation into the structures of experience which precede connected expression in language'. Valle and Halling (1989, p. 6) described phenomenology as:

... the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience...

Phenomenology does not hold that the world 'out there' can be known in the way a photographic plate takes in an image of the world. All knowing

is at one level subjective since it is always related to, and constructed by, the person engaged in knowing. As Spiegelberg, one of the authorities on the phenomenological movement, wrote (1959, p. 75):

All phenomenology takes its start from the phenomena. A phenomenon is essentially what appears to someone, that is to a subject.

Some of this subjectivity focuses on the things being experienced, while some focuses on the person experiencing the thing. Spiegelberg (ibid. p. 78) lists a range of meanings of subjectivity in order to explore the nature of more-than-purely-subjective subjective knowledge which is generated in phenomenological approaches. He writes:

I conclude that all phenomenology as a study of the phenomena, is subjective in the sense that its objects are subject-related but not in the sense that it makes them completely subject-dependent.

### **Objectivity and Subjectivity**

Research requiring 'objectivity' which is probably still the dominant public discourse surrounding ideas of research, has become associated with the positivist approach to research. Alternative approaches have sought to admit forms of human subjectivity into academic writing and to portray the personal as political and socially relevant. Neither of these positions has quite met the phenomenological project with its interest in, and focus on, 'the experience' that human subjects have, rather than on the human subjects having the experience. The phenomenological question was to find a way to name and portray human experience which would be both somewhat subjective and at the same time somewhat objective. To meet this challenge, I have taken phrases originally coined by Husserl (according to Dorion Cairn's translation) in his Third Cartesian meditation (1964), namely 'subjectivised subjective' experience and 'objectivised subjective'

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experience which are similar to Spiegelberg's 'subject dependent' and 'subject related' categories mentioned above.

Researchers returning to an experience they are trying to understand can ask themselves what the experience, for example being at or giving a seminar, was like as a lived experience (identifying their objectivised subjective feelings). They can also ask how they felt while in such an experience (identifying their subjectivised subjective feelings). Answers to the first question would tell something of *what being at or giving a seminar is like* in a way that would make it possible for others to imagine it could potentially be their experience. Answers to the second question tell more of *how those people responded to the experience*. This is the difference denoted between the two questions 'What was it like?' and 'How did you feel and what did you make of the experience?'

The phenomenological project seems to need both dimensions of the account. There is a sense that the objectivities that are highlighted in an experience are those which generated a strong subjective response. In a way, elements of an experience that do not impact upon the awareness of the person narrating it may not, in fact, be part of the phenomenon. The definition of a phenomenon - 'what manifests itself in experience' - suggests this, although in the process of reflection a person may become aware of many dimensions of an experience that were, in fact, manifested but somewhat not attuned to, or at least not foregrounded in, awareness.

The distinction between the two questions relates also to a distinction between what Crotty (1996a) has called 'new' phenomenology and 'classical' phenomenology, and which I called 'empathetic' and 'intuiting' forms in my book (Willis, 2002).

### 1. The Intuiting or Classical Form of Phenomenology

Crotty's research (1996a) into phenomenological approaches in nursing research was to point out what he called 'new' (and what is called here 'empathetic phenomenology') in contrast to classical phenomenology, and to show how whole traditions of research have been built on different construals of this approach. According to Crotty's exposition, the alternative approach does not focus so much on the phenomenon as it becomes visible, but on the subjective experiences and meanings that are generated in or are generated by its beholders. This is why I used the phrase 'empathetic phenomenology' since there is such a strong attention to subjective feelings and meanings in this 'new' form of applied phenomenology.

This 'new' phenomenology focuses on the meanings and significances given to an experience by those experiencing it. Crotty writes that (1996, p. 3):

The new phenomenology works hard at gathering people's subjective meanings, the sense they make of things ('What does giving post-mortem nursing care mean to those nurses?').

Such knowledge is of great interest in much social science. It shows that different people participating in an event in their lives may give it radically different meanings. Thus a patient and a health professional, an adult educator and an adult learner, may engage in a shared activity but have quite radically different experiences of it. It is then possible to enquire about the nature of the experience and how it presented itself as a phenomenon as in classical phenomenology or to follow the alternative empathetic phenomenology by inquiring what the subject made of that experience: what was its significance. This latter pursuit with interviews, thematic analysis and clustering of interview transcripts looking for the common meanings an experience had for a group of subjects, represents a major way of working in qualitative social science research. Its

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contribution is that it brings to view the subjective states and interpretations of people who have engaged in a common experience like teaching, university lecturing, nursing, church ministry and the like, and which may have been overlooked or repressed by powerful interests in society who wish to promote one 'official' reading of particular activities in different professions. Official readings of nursing activity written by hospital administrators may focus on the prescribed activities of the nurses and show how these fit into the hospital's therapeutic regime. The focus on prescribed activities does not have a place for what the experience of nursing might be like for its practitioners. Patricia Benner set out to fill this gap. She produced several works (1984, 1985, 1994) which expanded on the lived experience of nursing practice focusing particularly on their subjectivity and the meanings they gave to their experiences, their 'shared background of common meanings' (1984, p. 218). The focus is on the subject; it protects and values the contributions of various subjects engaged in life experiences.

This interpretative or what I have called 'empathetic' approach to phenomenological research has made a contribution by showing the socially embedded nature of human consciousness. It may not have advanced the cause of classical phenomenology, but it has defended and made known what groups of people - teachers, nurses, soldiers - have felt when involved in a shared experience, and what sense they made of it. The experience is then named in terms of the subjectivity it evokes in those who experienced it. Of course, the alternative or 'intuiting' approach has been lost or perhaps passed over. This involves bracketing out commonly held views of the phenomenon and allowing it to become revealed as what it is. This is the classical approach which attempts to unveil the 'whatness' of the experience so that its 'itness' becomes revealed.

I remember when I concentrated on the experience of adult education practice where I was attempting to evoke a change of attitude in welfare workers engaged with 'Aboriginal clients. I came up with the metaphor "siren singing for learning" which seemed to represent what the adult education practice appeared to me as I reflected on it. The whatness of adult education practice in this event seemed to present as a 'luring' or 'inviting' participants to a kind of shipwreck of their prejudices done through a process that initially was inviting and attractive but later became challenging and threatened to lead to an uncomfortable breakdown of entrenched prejudice.

The subjective stresses and emotional roller-coaster ride of that experience were evoked in that metaphor but they were not the specific point of the quest for the 'essential structure' of the experience. Siren singing for learning was not a *feeling* I had at the time nor the *meaning* I subsequently gave to the experience in the light of my reactions. It was a metaphor which came to me as I attempted to name what appeared directly to me as I held the episode before my mind. The 'siren singing' metaphor arose in response to the experience. What was strong in that experience was an image of luring learners to join in the activities leading to the death of their prejudicial and racist ideas and attitudes.

If the project still seeks to uncover and present "the things themselves" there are further challenges to the writer in the task of representing what has been uncovered. There is considerable diversity in the genres chosen for this task. Some have held to an essentially explanatory mode illumined with the occasional anecdote. Others have used a more artistic or expressive style.

While there continues to be extensive writing particularly in the health journals which build on the empathetic approach to phenomenology there is another significant division between different

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genres of representation in phenomenological research.

### Different Genres of Representation

In search of essences:

In much of the philosophical writings about phenomenology there is still a continuation and modification of 'quest for essences' of human experience in the style of Husserl. Contemporary philosophers do not necessarily hold literally to his idealistic belief that such essences had some kind of existence that could be discovered or revealed by the inexorable application of epoche or bracketing. Some do however seek to explain and to use the processes of uncovering or stripping pre-suppositions, and 'namings' to return to 'the things themselves'.

One of the ongoing queries which has always remained, since the days of post modern relativism, is a rationale for the ongoing assumption that some kind of essential 'whatness' continues to inhere in phenomena in such a way that there is value in seeking what that might be. In the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (Feb 2002), Sadala and Adorno take the reader through a systematic almost scientific exploration of the experience of nursing in an isolation ward by interviewing 18 student nurses involved in that practice. They were seeking as they said (p. 11)

...to reach the essential characteristics of the phenomenon under study which would enable understanding its essential meanings - its structure.

The interview transcripts were then analysed for significant themes to construct an *ideographic* analysis which was then re-analysed to generate a *nomothetic* analysis.

There is an implicit presumption in this language that could be taken to imply a Husserlian belief that human phenomena experienced have essential transcendent structures which can be uncovered after great labour. The researcher,

investigating a phenomenon of human experience, works back to identify and disregard all the presuppositions people have accepted in their naming of this phenomenon of their 'life world'. Ashworth (1999, p. 708) pointed out that it was Merleau Ponty's existential interpretation of this quest that made a version of the Husserlian project possible and useful. He writes:

Phenomenology is now the methodology of an existentialism which does not need to regard the transcendental realm as disengaged from the world, but does retain bracketing as the process of return to the pre-reflective life world, putting out of play the various interpretations and prejudices which would cloud its analysis.

The text that follows in Ashworth's paper in which he explores student cheating as a phenomenon gives a fine example of nuances of meaning and forms of bracketing that in different ways allow elements of the phenomenon to be made present. It is a carefully written piece that requires persistence and focused attention in the reader. There is an irony when the very text that has set out to uncover the livedness of lived experience can become deadening not intentionally but because of the scientific/propositional genre of the writing.

There are still many examples of this approach to phenomenology with its strong tendency to lengthy propositional attempts to unpack the implications and components of a phenomenon. A recent collection of writing 'for the phenomenology's second century' published in 2001 (Crowell, Embree & Julian), has 23 chapters in this general style exploring philosophical issues in phenomenology such as inter-subjectivity, construction, embodiment and ethics. There are also applications to fields of practice such as medicine, history, nursing, logic and mathematics. The chapter entitled

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*Phenomenology of Nursing as a cultural discipline* by Tocantins and Embree explores the experience of nursing from the sociological perspective of Alfred Schutz's typifying phenomenology.

There has always been a question as to the readership and readability of some of these studies. Leslie Todres (1998, p. 123) mentioned that the Duquesne school, of which he had considerable knowledge, used a phenomenological approach to work towards a generic understanding of human direct experiences such as anxiety or loneliness. In doing so their language, like those just cited, tended to be abstract and analytic so that its insight tends to run the risk of being lifeless and not often read. There was a need for broader genres of writing which would not 'kill' the phenomenon in the process of describing it. In the light of the agenda of phenomenological studies to bring readers minds and hearts back to the actual experience of things there was a serious need for a textual genres that could carry the livedness of the phenomena being investigated as well as its essential structure.

Van Manen suggested that the word 'essence' does not have to mean some ultimate core or residue of meaning:

A good description that constitutes the essence of something is constructed so that the structure of the lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way (p. 39)

He follows on from Merleau-Ponty's existential bent, by suggesting that the written text could be said to carry the essence of an experience

If the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner (ibid. p. 10).

On that note the discussion turns to textual ways that can be pursued to meet this task.

### **Ways to make living texts**

Seeking the living text:

Education and nursing researchers and a few of their social science colleagues have sought to produce texts that were more germane to the experience being explored rather than being reduced to a classic 'cooled out' and 'abstracted' report. One of the earlier contributors to this project was Clark Moustakas, whose 'Loneliness' published in 1961 pioneered literary and heuristic ways towards a portrayal of a lived experience. He used autobiographical reflections and stories of the experience of loneliness while being with his daughter when she was seriously ill. His heuristic account interwove reflections on the nature of loneliness with illustrative excerpts from his journal.

This mixture of propositional and reflective autobiographical writing was a powerful vehicle to take his readers into an appreciation of the nature of loneliness as a phenomenon. Moustakas was later to outline his heuristic phenomenology more formally (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). His excursion into narrative forms of writing was an early attempt at a departure from purely propositional writing.

Peter Reason (1988, p. 79) wrote of developing research approaches that would express more 'the liveliness, the involvement and even the passion' of the experiences being researched. In the same piece (p. 80) he suggests that meaning is interwoven with experience and that the inquirer will discover the meaning the experience has been given when he or she engages in ways to make it manifest:

... to make meaning manifest through expression requires the use of a creative medium through which the meaning can take form. This is not to be confused with a conceptual grid which divides up experience, it is rather the creation of an empty space...which becomes a vessel in which meaning can take shape.

He goes on to mention the languages of words (stories and poems), of colour and shape (painting and sculpture) and of actions (mime and drama) in which meaning can be created and communicated. He makes a significant point that meaning in this sense is never directly pointed out but rather is demonstrated or revealed 'by re-creating pattern in metaphorical shape and form'. Todres (op. cit. p. 123) takes this further by putting the powerful question:

What kinds of descriptions produce a feeling of understanding in the reader?

It was this insight that prompted the title of this paper. Todres takes a brief look at the contributions of Dilthey, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Hillman to this specific question. He begins by showing how Dilthey took up Husserl's phenomenological notion of 'intentionality' and applied it to the psychological word of thinking and feeling. Intentionality suggests that we humans are already embedded in the world we are aware of - our lifeworld - before becoming consciously aware of ourselves somehow separate from the world we inhabit. Dilthey then pointed to mental acts besides thinking such as 'feelings and purposes' which characterise human ways of being aware and alive in the world. The point then is that to describe comprehensively actual human experience requires textual ways to convey its emotional as well as its rational richness and somehow to involve the reader.

Todres (op. cit. 124) suggests that Dilthey's view is that 'to comprehend a human experience whether one's own or another's is to bring it into 'the light of one's possibilities' so that to understand is in a kind of way to 're-enact' the experience. He then suggests that Heidegger's

view was that understanding a phenomenon in its pre-reflective state means more than conceptually knowing or even intuiting it. It means becoming attuned to the mood that is the element of every human experience.

This has considerable resonance with Heron's view of what he called the most basic mode of human functioning, the 'affective' mode which involves feelings and emotions where 'feeling' is used in a specific sense to mean the human capacity to resonate with other beings. As he writes (1992, p. 119)

Feeling attunes us to a unique presence and its qualities of being; emotion is our state of fulfilled or frustrated need that correlates with that felt connection.

Todres suggests further that to generate understanding one will need to use a vehicle that "communicates the mood of a situation of experience (op.cit. p. 124). From a writer perspective to 'communicate a mood' needs appropriate textual vehicles to convey it.

Todres' reference then to Merleau-Ponty brings the bodily nature of human experience into foreground. Van Manen spoke of this perspective using the word 'existentials' (1990, p. 101) to convey lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relations (relationality or communality). Using these existentials helped to convey a 'bodily sense of being there' (Todres, op. cit. p. 125).

Todres' final author is the philosopher/psychologist James Hillman whose ideas were most developed in his essay 'The thought of the heart' (1981). Todres looks initially at how Hillman describes the way humans perceive by the act of 'aesthesia' which means at root 'taking in' and 'breathing in' - a gasp, as the 'primary aesthetic response'. Coincident with this act of perception, of taking

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in, is the heart's own thoughts which Hillman suggests, are imaginal. The important thing in Hillman's writing and Heron's as well, is the notion that the imaging process (imaginal knowing) precedes, underpins and shapes classifying acts of abstraction. These in their turn are the foundations of what Heron calls 'propositional' knowing in which a person identifies and classifies an experience from which judgments about it and possible action to be chosen. The propositional mode of knowing is based on the deeper less known imaginal mode.

### **Imaginal Knowing**

The word imaginal, coined by Corbin (1969), was developed further by Hillman. In his writing it refers to the world of images experienced and created not in the way of fantasy conveyed by the word 'imagination' but through what Hillman calls the 'action of the heart'. Following Hillman, Bradbeer (1998, p. 14) explains the imaginal function in this way:

"Imaginal" is not to be thought of imaginary, with its arbitrary and capricious aspects, but as designating the non arbitrary action of "the heart" .....The heart is often associated with a merely passive feeling capacity. The imaginal function, by contrast, accentuates the creative action of the heart. The making of myths, the accretion of significances around particular images, the very construction of the inside experience of life in our self-stories - all are the work of the imaginal capacity.

Hillman himself cites (1981, p. 2) Henri Corbin's view that:

the thought of the heart is the thought of images; that the heart is the seat of imagination, that imagination is the authentic voice of the heart, so that if we speak from the heart, we must speak imaginatively ... hearts cannot apprehend that they are imaginatively thinking hearts

It is this circle of aesthetic perception and imaginal reflection which is rooted in the heart, the seat of a person's usual attitude

to life which for the sake of personal morality and good community relations, needs to be oriented to goodness and beauty.

A similar view is found in the writings of John Heron. For him the psyche has a special 'imaginal' mode through which the experienced world is initially made present in images which are 'perceived' in an immediate way and made present in an immediate 'feeling' response. The linked 'feeling response' is essentially shaped by the stance of the person engaged in knowing. As he (1992, p. 138) puts it:

Images are packed with meaning prior to any explicit formulation of this meaning in verbal and conceptual terms.

At the same time the experienced world is also being named and classified according to the categories of a person's frames of reference.

The expressive agenda in phenomenological text making wants to encounter and give voice to this imaginal, pre-analytical mode of knowing and being.

### **Living texts: narrative, expressive, hermeneutic**

The construction of living texts seems to involve three elements. The first is simple narrative forms which seek to produce lively stories in which experience is re-visited and explored from different vantage points. In some cases such stories form an introductory element in a composite phenomenological account which juxtaposes other textual genres (cf. Willis, 2002). These have developed in the second or more expressive approach. This approach seeks to use the artistic tools of fiction, metaphor and poetry, the visual tools of pictorial and graphic art and sculpture and other artistic forms to create a portrayal which carries the immediacy and impact of an experience rather than any explanation of it. Forms of this expressive approach have also been referred to as arts-based approaches.

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## 2. Expressive and Arts Based Inquiry

The construction of expressive texts has been the project of various writers in education spearheaded by Elliot Eisner (1991, 1993) and his colleague Tom Barone (1997) and Patrick Diamond. The recent Australian text, *Being, Seeking Telling* (Willis, *et al.* 2001) which I, with colleagues edited, is another recent contribution to this field.

Expressive approaches to portraying a phenomenon are most concerned to approach their descriptive work with a strong focus on immediacy and livedness. In some ways the use of expressive approaches is an attempt to get something of the lived experience onto a vehicle of image rather than a vehicle of analysis. Once images had been constructed in verbal or non-verbal more graphic media, some researchers, turned expressive creators, attempt to 're-read' their artefacts with a parallel interpretative text. Expressive/interpretative researchers become somewhat like curators and interpreters of expressive works only these are of their own making.

The expressive approach which seeks verisimilitude and 'aliveness' has considerable similarities with a research writing process called hermeneutic phenomenology, which issues in hermeneutic text making. In a way this is a kind of hybrid construct which re-interprets the meaning of essentialist approaches by adding an existential dimension and seeking to create an alive accessible text by the use particularly of illustrative anecdotes.

## 3. Hermeneutic Text Making

Anecdotes of hermeneutic phenomenology which have been promoted particularly by Max Van Manen are carefully crafted accounts of experiences in which the essential meanings of an experience are embedded. The generation of such texts is usually a prolonged reflective writing and re-writing process in which the researcher tries to construct a composite anecdote

based on several various experiences of a phenomenon in which the essential meanings of the phenomenon are made evident. Van Manen's anecdotes are composite narratives in which essential meanings of a phenomenon are uncovered. Such texts tend to be more or less expository and to avoid more evocative, metaphoric forms of writing. These texts are to 'tell' as well as 'show'.

The reflective writing process developed by Max van Manen has taken its place as a fruitful approach to the work of turning phenomenological inquiry into living texts. Van Manen's developed a textual version of the hermeneutic circle by which the researcher with eyes locked to the phenomenon itself and attempting to bracket out any categories and pre-existing interpretations, would begin to construct a text in which the meaning of the phenomenon unfolded. Much of van Manen's writing and those of many of his students, whose writings were published in his 'Textorium', interweave narratives of the experience of the phenomenon with interpretative 'readings' in which the constitutive elements of the experience embedded in the narrative are carefully unfolded. Writers working with van Manen write successive drafts in their pursuit of an accurate and living account of the phenomenon they are trying to portray. Caelli (2001, p. 277) describes the process of what she calls 'deriving narratives from transcripts'. After hearing van Manen and Benner at a conference bring together interview data into what van Manen calls an 'anecdote', she then realised that van Manen often presented a phenomenological text as an anecdote 'derived from and perhaps cumulative of each interview transcript'.

This, of course, does not fully reflect the existential richness of van Manen's more transformative agenda. He writes (1990, p. 8):

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We begin to discern the silence in the writing - the cultivation of one's being, from which the words begin to proliferate in haltingly issued groupings, then finally in a carefully written work, much less completed than interrupted, a blushing response to a call to say something worth saying, to actually say something while being thoughtfully aware of the ease with which such speaking can reduce itself to academic chatter.

Van Manen has the view that phenomenological research shapes the researcher and makes her or him more critically self aware. His recommended writing and reflective re-writing have considerable parallels in phenomenological heuristics which has been made popular and accessible through the work of Clark Moustakas, mentioned earlier.

#### 4. Heuristics

Besides the sample of his phenomenological work in his writing on loneliness, he has provided guidelines (Moustakas, 1990, 1994), in which the steps of his heuristic, reflexive approach are actually laid out for researchers to follow. The steps are: Immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. As Conlan (2000, p. 116) writes:

Moustakas reminds us that 'to know and understand the nature, meanings and essences of any human experience,' it is necessary empathetically to appreciate the frame of reference of the person who has had or is having the experience. He says that human beings develop their 'most significant awareness.... from [their] own internal searches and from [their] attunement [to] and... understandings of others (1990, p. 26)

This paper concludes reflecting on the considerable development in the nature and practice of contemporary phenomenology. The empathetic/intuiting split has been a significant energising fragmentation in which a newer so-called empathetic form of phenomenology has co-opted symbolic interaction forms under the

phenomenology banner. The second development has been to do with different ways of presenting findings and the emergence of expressive and hermeneutic textual modes.

#### Finale

This brief summary of contemporary developments in applications of phenomenology in nursing and educational research is offered as a complement to the strong contemporary interest in cultural studies and the place of language and discourse in the construction of knowledge. The argument here of course is that the phenomenological approach is still a worthy project in its attempt to return 'the things themselves' and to attempt to 'create a feeling of understanding' for a phenomenon. This can then act as a kind of touchstone for scholars as they enter the polyphony of theorizing voices to remind them of the world of experience on which theory builds and against which in the final analysis, theory seeks or should seek validation.

#### About the Author

Peter Willis is Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of South Australia, specialising in the education and training of adults. He holds a Master degree in Anthropology from ANU and a PhD in adult education from the University of Technology of Sydney. After a period of youth work in inner city Melbourne, he spent more than a decade in community development and cultural awareness education with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Kimberley area of North Western Australia and in Central Australia.

His main research areas concern transformative and 'second chance' learning among adults, the role of the imagination in learning and the relationship between religion, spiritual practice and civil society.

He pioneered the use of phenomenological approaches in expressive research in his book *Inviting Learning: An exhibition of risk and enrichment in Adult Education practice* (London,

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NIACE 2002). His has edited, with Bob Smith, a book of essays on expressive approaches to qualitative research in adult and workplace education called *Being, seeking, telling: Expressive approaches to qualitative adult*

*education research*. His latest work is a collection edited with Pam Carden which is due for release in June 2004 and is entitled *Lifelong learning and the Democratic Imagination: Revisioning freedom, justice and community*.

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