Researching Lived Experience in Education: Misunderstood or Missed Opportunity?

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Abstract
Phenomenological research approaches have become increasingly popular in fields such as psychology, nursing, tourism, and health science but remain underrepresented in education research. This is surprising given that education, a discipline founded on attending to, and building upon, the knowledge and experiences of others, can only benefit from the insights and explication of human experience offered by phenomenological research. One reason for its disfavor may be the oft-intimidating philosophy that underpins, and is critical to the application of, phenomenological approaches to research. This article provides an overview of some of the phenomenology’s key philosophical principles. It pays particular attention to transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology, their key proponents, and tenets and outlines some similarities and differences between these two phenomenological lineages. Efforts to translate the philosophical principles of phenomenology into an approach to research are discussed, and examples of the application of transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenological approaches to education settings are explored. Once described as more a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique, phenomenology as a methodology is examined in terms of its trustworthiness and its potential to deepen our understanding (with a capital U) of the experiences of others. This article acts as a theoretical handrail to support researchers’ first steps into this rich philosophical and theoretical terrain with a view to encouraging increased adoption of this approach to research in education settings.

Keywords
phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, ontology, epistemology, methodology, Husserl, Heidegger

Introduction

Human beings who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so.

Douglas Adams

Learning from the experience of others is one of the greatest opportunities we have as a species, yet we sometimes mistrust human experience, reverting instead to external, rational sources of information. This mistrust, in research terms, has been traced back to the advent of Cartesian Dualism and the subsequent rise of logical-empirical research methodologies which resulted in our minds, feelings, and personal accounts being seen as inferior sources of information (Thomas et al., 2013). However, teaching and learning, whether the smallest child embarking on their first days of school or the most mature adult nurturing a lifelong passion for learning, is all about relationships and experiences (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Pianta, 2006). Learning from the experiences of others is essential for education researchers. In fact, it is foundational. Educators, advertently or inadvertently, draw on the experiences of others in the form of feedback, physical or verbal cues, and examining or direct questioning, in order to develop their practice. However, when it comes to more purposeful “research,” educators often hesitate in turning to the experiences of others as a source of information. What often deters or curtails such efforts is often a lack of methodology—knowing how to learn from the experience of others.

Phenomenology is all about understanding the lived experience of others. It is at once a philosophy, a perspective, and an approach to research. Those who rush to adopt phenomenology as a research approach rightly encounter strong warnings to
Phenomenology as a Philosophy

What Is Phenomenology?

The word phenomenology stems from the Greek phainòmenon meaning “thing appearing to view,” showing itself, flaring up (Moustakas, 1994). In simple terms, phenomenology is about understanding phenomena, or “things,” as they appear to, or are experienced by, others. That could be the phenomenon of English literature as it appears to a student with dyslexia. Or the phenomenon of a new curriculum to a teacher well-versed in literacy literature as it appears to a student with dyslexia. Or the phenomenon of Eng-

Transcendental (Descriptive) Phenomenology

The beginning of the phenomenological movement is often marked by the publication of Edmund Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen* (Logical Investigations, Husserl, 1970a, 1990–1901) although the term “phenomenology” was employed long before that by other German philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Brentano. Husserl was driven by the search for the essence, or foundations, of human knowledge; a search that had dominated Western philosophy since Des Carteres (1596–1650). Indeed, Husserl (1998) states “explicitly that the study of Descartes’ Meditations has influenced directly the formation of the developing phenomenology and given it its present form, to such an extent that phenomenology might almost be called a new twentieth century Cartesianism” (p. 3). Cartesianism is based on a fundamental distinction between the “inner” world of the mind or soul and the “outer” physical world with which it comes in contact (Thomas et al., 2013). This dualistic view, where the subject experiences, and has knowledge of, the outside (object) world through sense data and resulting mental representations, underpins not only Husserlian phenomenology but Western thought in general.

It may be helpful to understand that, before embarking on a philosophical career, Husserl was a mathematician. His early work focused on the question of foundation in mathematics before he later turned, under the guidance of Brentano and Stumpf, to “the solution of philosophical problems” (Buckley, 1997, p. 328). The philosophical problem that most consumed Husserl was “the mystery of subjectivity and the question of the constitution of objectivity; that is, how does consciousness attain to objective knowledge?” (Moran, 2000, p. 61). Consciousness, according to Husserl, is the basis of all experience. He devoted his career to the study of human consciousness, describing it as “the wonder of all wonders” (Husserl, 1970b, p. 18). He believed phenomenology would be the means by which the experience of phenomena, as they appear through human consciousness, could be studied. He summed up this emphasis on how phenomena appear in human consciousness, as opposed to how they are supposed to appear in accordance with some abstract theory, in his renowned call “zu den sachen selbst!” or “to the things themselves!” (Husserl, 1965, p. 116). This shift in emphasis from observations of external reality to consciousness has been described as being akin to that of “a natural scientist who has just discovered a previously unknown dimension of reality” (Staiti, 2012, p. 40).

If the consciousness is the site for the solution to philosophical problems, the solution itself, so to speak, is the description of the essence, or essential structures, of a phenomenon (hence, transcendental phenomenology is frequently referred to as descriptive phenomenology). The eidos, or essence, of a phenomenon is its “essential, necessary feature” (Moran, 2000, p. 78)—that which makes a thing what it is, without which it could not be what it is. Phenomenology for Husserl (1982) was the “science of essences” (*eine Wesenswissenscha*), and he believed that everything which appears to human consciousness could be studies by phenomenology.
Husserl proposed a set of procedures by which the essence of a phenomenon as it appears to consciousness might be isolated. He generally labels these procedures as the “reduction” (from the Latin reducere, “to lead back”). The first of these procedures is “bracketing” (Einklammerung) or epoché. This process involves putting aside or bracketing, in the way that one would use brackets in a mathematical equation, previous understandings, knowledge, or assumptions about the phenomenon of interest. The term, epoché, comes from the Sceptics where it means a “cessation” or suspension of judgment where “we neither reject nor accept anything” (Barnes, 1990, p. 9). Husserl (1970a) recommends epoché or the suspension of certain fundamental structures as a way to go “back to the things themselves” (p. 168). A second procedure, transcendental phenomenological reduction, involves preparing a detailed description of a phenomenon’s meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). A third procedure, free imaginative variation, requires us to consider our description of a phenomenon and isolate the essential features which cannot be varied in our imagination. Imaginative free variation requires us to ask is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or remove this theme or essence from the phenomenon? For example, we might presume a pedagogical relation to be essential to teaching. To test this essence, we try to imagine teaching such that this experience does not involve a pedagogic component. This seems impossible. Therefore, we might determine that the essence of being a teacher is to engage in a pedagogic relationship with another regardless of whether that is a child and adolescent or adult or whether it is in formal or informal settings. Once established, essences become the foundation for all knowledge about a phenomenon.

Husserl cast himself in the role of founder of a new and radical movement, “a Moses leading his people to the new land of transcendental subjectivity” (Moran, 2000, p. 2). However, many of his students disagreed with the elements of Husserl’s phenomenology. They were unconvinced by the value of reduction, or indeed, the possibility of ever successfully “bracketing out” influences such as culture and history. Some of these students embarked on their own paths to understanding, leading Husserl, toward the end of his life, to declare himself a “leader without followers.” Indeed, the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1987) once described phenomenology as “the story of the deviations from Husserl” (p. 9).

**Hermeneutic (Interpretive) Phenomenology**

Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, initiated perhaps the most important of these deviations, the hermeneutic deviation or “turn” (Couzens Hoy, 1993). The term hermeneutic (from the Greek hermeneuein meaning to “translate” or “interpret”) is thought to be derived from the Greek God Hermes, whose job it was to interpret and communicate messages from Zeus and the other Gods to ordinary mortals. What is fundamentally different about Heidegger’s phenomenology was that he is concerned, not, as Husserl was, with what we can know about the world (epistemology) but with what it means to be in the world (ontology). He was driven by “the question of the meaning of Being” (die Seinsfrage; Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 2), and this focus on being-in the world lies in contrast to Husserl’s focus on “acts of attending, perceiving, recalling and thinking about the world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). Heidegger referred to this human being-in-the-world as Dasein, a German word which literally translates as there-being (da-there; sein-being). Being-in-the-world is hyphenated to emphasize the inseparability of a being and the world in which it “bes,” that “the mode of being of human beings is to be there, that is, in the world” (Schmidt, 2006, p. 52).

A second way in which Heidegger deviates from his teacher Husserl is in relation to the very nature of truth itself. Husserl, as explored previously, felt that philosophy should focus on essences and procuring a pure description of the things themselves as they are experienced through our consciousness. Heidegger, however, accuses Husserl of presupposing the subject–object divide (Cartesian dualism) where the ego, as subject, is confronted by external objects. Instead, he believes that meaning is inherent within lived experience, that “a subject does not attach meaning to an experienced object, but rather that the meaning is already there as soon as the so-called object is present” (Schmidt, 2006, p. 51). Heidegger gave an example of this in his 1919 lecture series “The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldviews.” He enters the lecture theater and looks at the lectern. In his experience, he doesn’t see a sequence of brown surfaces that meet at right angles nor a small box on a larger box but rather, all at once, the lectern. The lectern, for him, is not a meaning that he added to the sense data of brown surfaces, as empiricists would argue. Nor does he have the experience of whole lectern by focusing on its essence as Husserl would suggest. Heidegger sees it all at once and in context. He encourages his students to examine their own immediate experience of the lectern and imagine what the experience of the lectern would be like for a farmer from the Black Forest or a native from Senegal. For Heidegger, the lectern is too high (Heidegger was quite short) and somebody had left a book on top crowding the available space. He experiences the lectern from a particular orientation, with a particular elucidation and from a particular background. The lectern, as he experiences it, already carries a particular meaning—one which he cannot “forget” nor bracket out. The environment is not laden with objects to which the subject must attach meanings rather the lived environment is at once meaningful. This was perhaps Heidegger’s most radical departure from Husserlian phenomenology and his most profound addition to philosophy. Meaning is encountered in the lived experience itself.

While Heidegger (1928/1999) considered hermeneutics “the announcement and making known of the being of a being in its being” (p. 7), predominantly through language, phenomenology is much more the “how of research” (p. 58). He wanted to understand phenomena “as they show themselves in themselves” (Heidegger, 1928/1999, p. 58). However, the difficulty with this is that person doing the understanding is also a being-in-the-world and will invariably, by virtue of their curiosity, already know something about the phenomenon at hand.
While this is not a problem per se, it does require us to take a “step away from the subject matter initially given and back to that on which it is based” (Heidegger, 1928/1999, p. 58).

All understanding, according to Heidegger, is based on prior understanding which he terms the “forestructures of understanding.” Consisting of three interrelated concepts, “fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 123), the forestructures of understanding represent what we already know (consciously or unconsciously) about a phenomenon. They form the basis for what it is possible for us to understand; “[for] we understand in terms of what we already know [because without that] there would be no understanding at all” (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 13).

Heidegger (1927/1996) makes the point that “interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something previously given” (p. 150) and argues that, even in the most exact, presuppositionless, interpretation “what is there” “is nothing else than the self-evident, undisputed prejudice of the interpreter” (p. 150). This point is critical in that it emphasizes Heidegger’s thesis that no understanding can avoid these forestructures of understanding. He suggests that rather than try to “bracket out” these presuppositions and prejudices we need to turn toward and carefully examine them. It is only by examining these forestructures that we can hope to enter the hermeneutic circle of understanding “in the right way” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 153).

The hermeneutic circle reflects Heidegger’s assertion that all understanding is inherently circular. We begin with a background understanding, a projection, or anticipation of meaning and proceed to confirm or alter this projection in a circular fashion. The hermeneutic circle reflects an ongoing relation between the whole and its parts. For example, consider the following four “parts,” pausing to consider the “whole” after each one.

John was on his way to school.
He was worried about the maths lesson.
He wasn’t sure if he could control the class today.
It was not part of the janitor’s duties. (Segal et al., 2002, p. 224)

At first, we may have imagined a small boy on his way to school but, as each part revealed itself, the whole altered so that, by the end, John was an adult janitor facing a somewhat unreasonable task. The first sentence creates a preconception about the whole which in turn changes in light of each additional part.

Considered by some to be the most important and influential philosopher of the 20th century (Critchley, 2009), Heidegger’s focus on lived experience as a source, if not the source of understanding, makes his philosophy particularly relevant to education researchers. The challenge in adopting a philosophical approach such as hermeneutic phenomenology is translating its often-complex philosophical concepts into methodological techniques. Indeed, as Roberts and Taylor (2001) have noted, “many of the so-called phenomenological methods leave prospective researchers wondering just what to do” (p. 109; Table 1).

### Phenomenology as an Approach to Research

It has often been said of phenomenological methods that there is no method (Gadamer, 1979; Rorty, 1979; van Manen, 1990). However, its growing popularity in fields such as nursing, psychology, and social work suggests that, in a world defined by the rigorous pursuit of knowledge, a *methodos* or way has been found or developed. Heidegger (1927/1996) described phenomenological reflection as following certain woodland paths toward a “clearing” where something could be shown or revealed in its essential nature. These paths (*methodos*), however, cannot be determined by fixed signposts; rather, “they need to be discovered or invented as a response to the question at hand” (van Manen, 1990, p. 29).

The variety of phenomenological methods reflects the many paths chosen by phenomenological researchers. The first generation of phenomenological research followed a largely descriptive path laid down by van Kaam (1966) and the Duquesne School of Psychology. Perhaps, the most well-known member of this school, Giorgi (1970, 1985), formalized descriptive phenomenology into what is known as the “classically Husserlian” (Langridge, 2007, p. 55) “empirical-structural” method. Colaizzi (1973) attempted to further systematize the empirical-structural method with his seven-step approach, while American psychologist Moustakas (1994) offered a further step-by-step, Husserl-inspired, system for accessing the essence of experiences. Another psychologist, Donald Polkinghorne (1983) placed particular emphasis on narrative in developing his phenomenological “human

### Table 1. Transcendental and Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A Comparison.

| Transcendental (Descriptive) Phenomenology | Hermeneutic (Interpretative) Phenomenology |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Edmund Husserl | Martin Heidegger |
| Focus on epistemology (what we can know about the world) | Focus on ontology (what it means to be in the world) |
| Mechanistic worldview (founded on Cartesian dualism—mind/body split) | Contextualistic worldview (a being cannot be isolated from the world in which it “bes”) |
| Understanding is reached through a description of the “essence” of a phenomenon | Understanding is circular (hermeneutic circle) |
| Interpreter bias is “bracketed” out | Interpreter must explicate the “forestructures” of their understanding |
science” methodos, again, largely in the descriptive phenomenology tradition.

Hermeneutic phenomenological research methods began to emerge slightly later. This may be because Heidegger himself rebelled against method. He disliked the term research, considering it the mark of modern science which he saw as excessively preoccupied with itself and its method. It therefore fell to others to define what hermeneutic phenomenology was to become as a research method. Canadian educationalist Max van Manen (1990) was one of the first to do so with his method described as “the most consistent with phenomenology as a philosophy” (Munhall, 2012, p. 117).

van Manen (1990) describes his hermeneutic phenomenological methodos as

the phenomenological and hermeneutical study of human existence: phenomenology because it is the descriptive study of lived experience (phenomena) in the attempt to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning; hermeneutics because it is the interpretive study of the expressions and objectifications (texts) of lived experience in the attempt to determine the meaning embodied in them. (p. 38)

Rather than paving a clear path with procedure, van Manen (1990) outlines six principles designed to act as signposts, leaving the exact route to be defined by the research question at hand. These are (i) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world, (ii) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it, (iii) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon, (iv) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting, (v) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and (vi) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. These six principles provide researchers with the opportunity to avoid the “scrap-heap” described by Barthes above but also requires that they become fully grounded in the philosophy of phenomenology so that, even with the principles offered by van Manen and other researchers honoring the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, they have the basic awareness and instincts required to navigate the complex landscape of the human.

Examples of Phenomenological Research in Education

Phenomenology has been famously described as “a science of examples” (Van den Berg, 1955, p. 54). While examples of phenomenological research may be seen in greater abundance in fields such as psychology, nursing, and health science, education researchers too have adopted phenomenological approaches. This article concludes by providing a sample of education research studies adopting transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenological approaches.

Eddles-Hirsch (2015) was guided by the principles of transcendental phenomenology in her study of the experience of gifted elementary school children in school programs specially designed for their advanced learning needs. The author analyzed data generated from in-depth interviews using a adapted form of Moustakas’ (1994) Husserlian transcendental phenomenology— informed mode of data analysis. This process of reduction began with the “horizontalization” of the data, similar to the epoché or bracketing advocated by Husserl, before going on to a “reduction and elimination” stage which isolated the moments of the experience that are a “necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it” (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 255). Eddles-Hirsch then gathered together these “meaning units” to form core themes for each of the study’s 27 participants and three schools. The final step in their process saw Eddles-Hirsch (2015) amalgamate the core themes from participants and schools to form a composite description that “represented the essences . . . of the phenomenon researched” (p. 258). The outcome of the study was a composite description highlighting the students’ desire for acceptance, the social coping strategies they employ, and the effects, positive or otherwise, of their various schools’ efforts to accommodate their advanced learning needs.

Raffanti (2008) adopted a transcendental phenomenological approach to studying teacher’s experiences of peer leadership. He references phenomenology’s appropriateness in “studying the everyday lives of ordinary people” (p. 59) and attributes his selection of transcendental phenomenology to his appreciation of “Husserl’s scientific approach to philosophy” (p. 60). Raffanti (2008) conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 10 teacher leaders guided by two open questions: (a) tell me about your teaching career and (b) tell me about leadership experiences you had during your teaching career. In line with transcendental phenomenology’s emphasis on bracketing, Raffanti describes engaging in a process of epoché before each interview “in which I made a good faith effort to set aside prejudgments in order to see the phenomenon with fresh eyes” (p. 60).

In analyzing the data, Raffanti (2008) was also guided by Moustakas’s (1994) methodological translation of Husserl’s philosophy in order to reach what he calls the “essential expressions” (p. 61) of each participant’s experience of peer leadership. He then clustered each of these “essential expressions” into four themes: (a) fostering relationships, (b) monitoring self, (c) managing perceptions, and (d) engaging purpose; before exploring all possible meanings and alternatives through imaginative variation, Raffanti (2008) describes each theme using supporting quotations and finally describes the essence of teacher leadership as “sitting beside” followers (p. 58). While Raffanti takes care to highlight the limitations of transcendental phenomenology, namely, the limitations of epoché and the small sample size that such an approach requires, he concludes that the understanding that comes with drawing on lived experience outweigh these limitations.

As an educational scholar-practitioner, I value such understanding as it empowers me to conceive intervention schemes grounded in the experiences of teacher leaders themselves. (Raffanti., 2008, p. 60)

Giles et al. (2012) adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understanding the nature of lived experience of the
teacher–student relationship. Underpinned by the philosophical writings of Heidegger, and Heidegger’s student Gadamer, Giles’ began his research by exploring his own prejudices and preassumptions as researcher in relation to the phenomenon. He then conducted in-depth interviews with nine teacher education lecturers and eight preservice teachers to gather thick descriptions of participants’ everyday experiences of the teacher–student relationship. Using participant’s words, Giles crafted 119 stories in chronological and/or logical order, verifying and clarifying each story with participants before further analysis. This analysis generated three main findings. The first was that teachers and students are always in relationship and that, while variously experienced, the relationship matters. Second, teacher’s “mode of being,” who they are and how they are in the world, can have a significant impact on the teacher student relationship—both positive and negative. Third, the relationship between a teacher and a student is always “in play.” He captures and examines participants’ accounts of how, immersed in dynamic and unpredictable relating, the teacher and student “move and become” in each situation.

In concluding, Giles highlights that while relationships are essential to the educational experience, they are largely out of sight and taken for granted. Hermeneutic phenomenology offered an approach to look beneath the “taken for grantedness” and explicate the dispositions, sensibilities, and movement that comprise these relational experiences. Giles et al. (2012) suggest that “foregrounding relationships in education has the potential for humanising educational praxis in the face of powerful and dominant educational discourses that have taken the teacher-student relationship for granted for the sake of the system that ought to serve it” (p. 223).

The author (Farrell, 2017) adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understanding (a) the nature of the lived experiences of third-level students with mental health difficulties and (b) how these students made sense of, or ascribed meaning to, their experiences. In total, 27 third-level students from a variety of third-level institutions shared their experiences over the course of multiple conversational interviews. Generating almost 1,000 pages of narrative data, these interviews were analyzed using a combination of the principles of the hermeneutic circle of understanding, moving continuously from the “parts” of the text to its “whole,” and Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method of thematic analysis.

The students’ individual accounts, and the total of 36 thematic features that dominated these narrative landscapes, revealed much about the nature of the lived experience of the students with mental health difficulties. Moreover, early on in the data analysis process, a pattern emerged in how the students made sense of, or ascribed meaning to, their experiences. Perhaps one of the greatest advantages of a hermeneutic phenomenological data generation process, one that includes just a single opening question (can you tell me about yourself and your experience?), is that it creates a “space” and a freedom for the participant to tell their story, in their own words and their own way, unobstructed by rubrics, or interview schedules. The pattern that emerged in the way that students structured their experiences into meaningful wholes was underpinned by four discrete but fluid phases: “pre” narrative, crisis/interruption, narrative wreckage, and “post” narrative.

The first phase, the “pre” narrative, described the factors that the students themselves identified retrospectively as being important in the development of their mental health problem. These include the experiences of childhood trauma and abuse, bulling and other school-related issues, perfectionism, and, for many, a perplexing reality that there was no “reason” for “it.” Regardless of whether there was an identifiable “reason” for “it” (“it” being the term used, in the absence of an agreed or universal alternative, to describe the psychological distress experienced by the students), each student seems to reach a point, almost inevitably, where they could no longer ignore or contain the distress alone. For many students, the “crisis point,” a term used by Mary, came as the, often explosive, result of escalating internal and/or external tensions. For others, it was somebody close to them who noticed that they were struggling and interrupted the narrative they had been constructing around the experience. For a small number, this second, crisis/interruption stage, was marked by the point at which they “just couldn’t do it anymore” (Annie) and they considered or attempted to take their own lives.

The third, “narrative wreckage” stage in the students’ meaning-making structure, describes “what happens then.” It encompasses the ways in which the students sought help, how, from whom and what happened; as well as the ways in which they tried to build meaning from the “wreckage” of the narrative they had for so long, told about themselves. The fourth stage in the narrative plot is the “post” narrative stage. A minority of student participants described “it” as being something in the past or, more commonly, subtly and noninvasively incorporated into their present. This structure, and the themes each phase encompasses, offers an understanding of what it is like for students with mental health difficulties in higher education and the ways in which they have attempted to make sense of these experiences.

It has been suggested that there are two ways of understanding—understanding with a small “u” which represents any type of comprehension (e.g., “I understand that one plus one makes two”) and understanding with a capital “U” (Polkinghorne, 1983). The latter refers to a very specific type of understanding—the understanding of meaning (e.g., “do you understand what is meant by that?”). Phenomenology, as a philosophy and an approach to research, is all about Understanding. It brings us into closer contact with what it is actually like which, in turn, enables us to respond, as educators, as humans, with insight and compassion in developing policy, instigating change and in engaging in our role as educators and as humans.

However, research focused on understanding with a capital U is also more susceptible to criticism of its trustworthiness than understanding with a small u. For example, one might question whether Eddles-Hirsch’s (2015) findings are generalizable beyond the 27 students and the three schools in her study? Or if the “good faith” in which Raffanti (2008, p. 60) attempted to set aside his prejudices can be relied upon?
Or the degree to which the findings presented by Giles et al. (2012) or Farrell (2017) can be confirmed? These issues of trustworthiness apply to all forms of qualitative research (Koch, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polkinghorne, 2007; Sandelowski, 1986) and indeed all forms of research in general, but in applying the same degree of thoughtfulness to the method as to the phenomenon itself, phenomenological researchers can clearly demonstrate the trustworthiness of their research.

**Conclusion**

The ability to learn from the experiences of others presents one of the greatest opportunities available to us as human beings. Phenomenology, as a philosophy and approach to research, is wholly focused on Understanding (with a capital U) the experiences of others. As such, it offers those with a particular interest in understanding human experience and development a means of approaching and engaging with complex phenomena. However, phenomenology, with its complex language and concepts, can appear daunting at first sight. This article sought to allay apprehension by providing an overview of the philosophical principles that underpin the two predominant phenomenological lineages, transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology, and offer examples of education researchers’ efforts to employ methodologies inspired by this rich philosophy. It is done so in the belief that understanding lived experience can only enhance and enrich the field of education research and practice.

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