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Introduction to Diverse Approaches to Phenomenology and Education

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Increasing interest in phenomenology as a philosophy and a research movement among educationalists, as well as in some other areas of the humanities and social sciences, makes this book both timely and relevant for educational debate. There is no doubting the extensive influence of phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hanna Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jean-Paul Sartre and Alfred Schutz on research and scholarship in philosophy, where phenomenology has its origins. As the impact of phenomenology extended beyond philosophy to fields such as sociology, education, anthropology, politics, linguistics, psychology and feminist studies, it has challenged taken-for-granted assumptions and prompted new insights into what it means to live, work, play and learn in our world. This interest in phenomenology can perhaps be understood in the context of its potential contribution to re-thinking our understanding of the complex phenomena we encounter in the dynamic and, at times, confronting world in which we find ourselves in this 21st century.

Not surprisingly, this book on phenomenology and education is rich in its diversity and breadth. This is as it should be, especially as the chapters do not have in common a specific educational question or issue as their focus. Instead, in their different ways, the authors explore contributions of phenomenology to educational practice and research, demonstrating phenomenology is a contemporary movement that is both dynamic and varied (see also Spiegelberg, 1982). In addition, some of the chapters bring phenomenology into dialogue with other research approaches, such as feminist scholarship. This again reflects the development of thought and scholarship in contemporary phenomenology, whereby phenomenology is enriched by other research approaches while also making a substantial contribution to them.

The refereed chapters in this book address a range of key educational issues including learning through the body, writing online, being an authentic teacher, ambiguities in becoming professionals, schools as places that disturb the self, and school transition. The chapters are equally varied in the theories and concepts upon which they draw. Through interrogating ideas from phenomenology, this book provides insights into a range of educational questions. In addition to insights into specific questions, the chapters illustrate a range of ways of inquiring phenomenologically. Martin Heidegger (1962/1927), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989/1960) and others have argued that phenomenology is not a method

but a 'way of inquiring' that must be responsive to the phenomena being explored. This emphasis is consistent with Edmund Husserl's call to 'return to the things themselves', a central tenet of the various branches of phenomenology.

A clear demonstration of a way of 'doing phenomenology', or inquiring phenomenologically, can be seen in the chapter by Max van Manen and Cathy Adams. In their evocative chapter they explore various aspects of writing online, with rich use of metaphor. Given the increasingly pervasive use of online environments across educational settings, Max van Manen and Cathy Adams' chapter makes a pertinent and timely contribution to understanding learning and teaching online.

While Max van Manen and Cathy Adams incorporate embodiment when they explore writing online, Robyn Barnacle makes the body and learning the focus of her chapter. She adopts a phenomenological approach to recent feminist scholarship that challenges a neglect of biology in accounts of the body and mind-body relations, using the role played by the gut to illustrate the arguments. She considers implications of re-thinking mind-body relations for learning. Robyn Barnacle's chapter stretches the boundaries of the way we typically think about learning in educational settings.

Michael Bonnett's chapter also casts new light on learning in educational settings. He thoughtfully explores the question of whether schools can be places in which the self can be disturbed—in both positive and negative ways. More particularly, he poses a question about whether these disturbances can be pathological for students to the extent their potential for selfhood is diminished. The chapter by Michael Bonnett prompts us to think about educational institutions in new ways, especially in terms of the kinds of places that schools are for students.

Two of the remaining chapters address issues related to becoming professionals, including teachers in schools. My own chapter explores learning during professional education programs, where I argue for the need to reconfigure these programs as a process of becoming that is always open and incomplete. Martin Heidegger's phenomenology of education forms a background for the chapter, while Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'ambiguity' provides a means of exploring how professional ways of being can be learned. The chapter has relevance for all those who contribute to professional education programs, as well as continuing education.

In Angus Brook's chapter, he describes his own experience of attempting to use Martin Heidegger's phenomenology in coming to terms with becoming a teacher. He explores what authenticity means in teaching and learning, with a view to investigating ways in which phenomenology can inform teaching practice. He touches on a theme taken up in my own chapter when he explores teaching and learning in terms of students' becoming. Angus Brook's chapter is located in the transition from writing a PhD thesis on Heideggerian phenomenology to becoming a school teacher. It provides a form of pragmatic validity (Kvale, 1989) for key concepts, such as authenticity, through testing their relevance and applicability to challenges in the practice of teaching.

The chapter by Lisa Ehrich and Krishnaveni Ganeson is also about transition. It reports an empirical study that explores students' experiences of transition to high school, which for large numbers of school students coincides with the early years

of adolescence. Using the phenomenological psychological approach developed by Amedeo Giorgi, they identify important aspects of school transition, confirming as well as calling into question previous research on school transition and middle schooling. They discuss implications for facilitating the transition to high school that have the potential to benefit new high school students and schools.

This book shows how insights into key educational questions can be achieved through exploring and interrogating ideas and concepts from phenomenology, as well as through inquiring phenomenologically. It demonstrates ways in which phenomenology can inform a broad range of aspects of educational theorising and practice. My hope is that the book will form part of a critical and constructive dialogue on the contribution that phenomenology can continue to make to educational practice and research.

References

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