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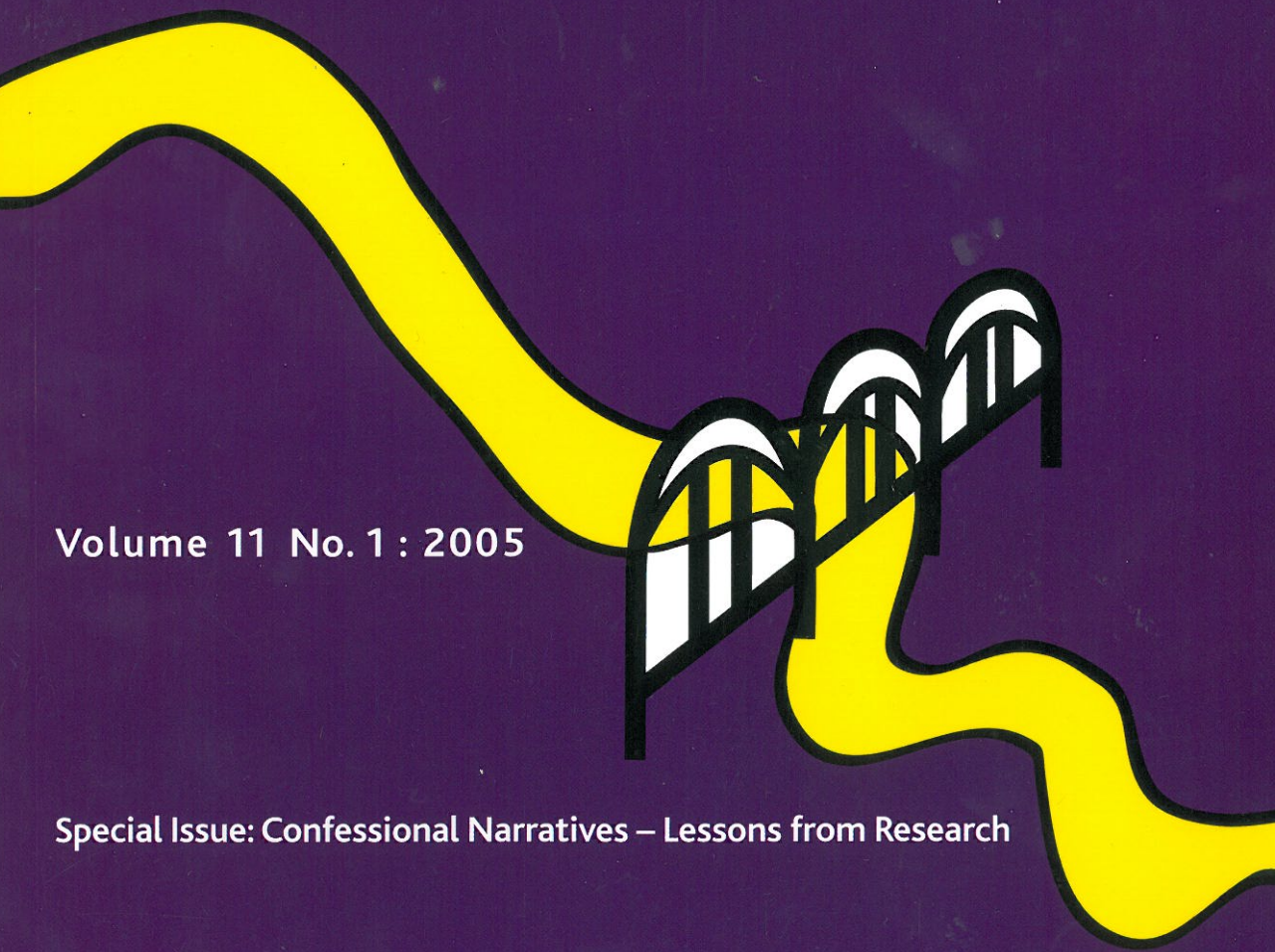

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TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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The Waikato Journal of Education is a well-established peer reviewed publication that has quality articles on a range of topics related to education.

New Zealand has a strong presence in Pacific education, and Pacific communities have a strong presence in New Zealand schools. However, opportunities for publication of Pacific research in mainstream journals are limited. Therefore, this call for papers seeks articles that focus on Pacific education; both research and practice. Pacific research is reflective of the traditions of the past, as well as the present and future. It often embodies different paradigms, perspectives and critical stances that are not always captured in mainstream research and aims to benefit Pacific communities. Articles will be welcomed that theorise about Pacific research, report on research projects, report on an innovative practice or initiative, or a combination of any of these. As well as traditional manuscripts, the journal welcomes submissions in other formats, such as short stories, poetry and drawings.

Submissions please to Timote Vaioleti (vaioleti@waikato.ac.nz) and Jane Strachan (jane@waikato.ac.nz), School of Education, The University of Waikato, PB 3105, Hamilton. Please submit 3 blind copies and a separate page with author/s contact details by 30 April 2006. Electronic submissions also accepted for consideration.

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PHENOMENOLOGY: AN EXPERIENCE OF LETTING GO AND LETTING BE

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ABSTRACT *Phenomenology is a methodological approach to research that has been broadly influential on established qualitative and interpretative perspectives. Founded in the work of German philosophers, it offers challenges in both understanding and practice. These stem, in part, from the requirement of the researcher to actively seek personal and deep meaning from those who are studied; and from the embedded requirement to acknowledge researcher influence and involvement in the research process. Through engaging in a phenomenological investigation into spiritual leisure, I realized the potential of research to be both personally fulfilling, and an empowering experience for myself as a researcher and as a person. A significant aspect of the research process that contributed to this was the lived experience of getting to know myself and knowing others as I simultaneously 'let go and let be'. Shared through this paper is a selection of experiences that exemplify that edifying process, including the emergent need to focus on letting go of personal doubts, aspects of my research training and research expectations in order to be able to conduct a detailed research project and to take on the challenges of phenomenology itself. With phenomenology embedded in encouraging researchers to let down our shields and engage with research that is personally relevant, my own experience revealed that research can be more than finding out, it can also include an embracing of not knowing. In such ways it is suggested that research is not just a process of data collection but a potential forum for becoming more whole as people as we actively reflect, know ourselves and see the world through others' eyes.*

KEY WORDS

Phenomenology, Reflexivity, Self-doubt, Meaning

INTRODUCTION

From a theoretical perspective phenomenology was born out of a critique of the philosophy of science. Concerned with the dominance of scientific research and its focus on the material, phenomenology aims to locate the experiencing person as a central focus of research and knowing (Crotty, 1996; Moustakas, 1994). Historically based on the original work of Edmund Husserl (1907/1990), phenomenology is the label given to research that seeks to study the world as it presents itself to us as humans. As a result this form of inquiry asks us to explore and describe how specific everyday phenomena appear in our consciousness in particular circumstances (Moustakas, 1994; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). While variously implemented in practice, phenomenology is well developed in its

orientation to the discovery, development and investigation of what it means to be human. This is achieved through the researcher engaging in personal reflection, contemplation, intuition and insight into self and others.

At a very human level, the processes embedded within phenomenological research offer the opportunity to wholly engage the self as researcher, as we are asked to not only understand other, but to recognize the place of self in the meaning-making process. At an applied level, Husserl recognised that all knowledge is unavoidably affected by the knower. This means that we can never have pure or unmediated access to that which is, other than through ourselves (Husserl, 1907/1990). When we attempt to understand the world we do not access it 'as it is', but rather, 'as it is to us'. In practice this means that in the act of trying to make sense of the world it is inevitable that we will always find something of our self, both historically and culturally (Barnacle, 2001). The implication of this leads to a realisation that all understanding reflects the particularity of the knower, and as such cannot be thought of as absolute. With this in mind, knowledge is never complete, either for the 'knower' or the researcher. Thus, phenomenology requires the researcher to be cognisant of their preconceptions and to share these with the reader. In this way it is anticipated that researchers are not so much predicting or explaining with authority that which is observed, rather they are attempting to determine meaning through processes of reflective description (Faber, 1943; Husserl, 1975).

Shifting research from a pedestal of literal or figurative truth, phenomenological research differs from traditional scientific studies which are narrowly defined, problem driven and seeking to find 'answers'. Instead a phenomenological study explores the whole, the essence of a phenomenon and in so doing remains open to the complexity of facets that inform any experience. When applied to my own research desire to explore spiritual leisure experiences, phenomenology offered a method of study that accommodated for a search for meaning and not fact, and allowed me to seek knowledge through subjectivity whilst still following a rigorous research process. Thus, the focus of the study lay in examining the conscious components and phenomenological essences of spiritual leisure by looking to the experience itself as it is lived and remembered by individuals.

While the phenomenological tradition does not intentionally offer a specific set of rules and procedures for inquiry, there are cyclical pathways and techniques which have been consistently identified as viable to the research approach. In overview these include intentional phases of personal contemplation such as identifying researcher suppositions, and a cycle of awareness of human consciousness and meaning by implementing stages of review, active listening, discarding preconceptions and being open to what others said, not what we desired to hear. While these phases are inherent in the phenomenologically-specific, and linguistically obtuse, techniques of 'epoche', 'phenomenological reduction' and 'imaginative variation' (Moustakas, 1994), the essence of the interaction lay in a need for me to let go of my own expectations and to allow the experiences of others be heard from the foundation of the co-researchers clarity and intent.

With this in mind the practical implications of engaging with, and using phenomenology as a researcher were very challenging and personally rewarding. For example, while there was an array of challenges to confront these were mainly challenges within me and included challenges related to self-doubt, the need for acceptance, and finding my space, way of being and personal relevance as an academic. As a result I had to let go of some of these doubts and questions in order to be able to progress and research not only with my head, but with my heart and my soul. Seeking to know how others experienced, the phenomenological process required me to not simply be an academic expert prepared with a series of pre-determined questions to fire at my co-researchers. Rather I was challenged to be an engaged part of the process, reflecting on my spiritual leisure (just as I asked my co-researchers about theirs), cognizant of my pre-determined expectations (and willing to set these aside), challenged to question what I thought and believed (and embed this honest reflection in the research process), and seeking ways to be open to other ways of thinking, experiencing and being (listening, engaging and respecting what the co-researchers said and implied). Confronted with this opportunity, I had to let go of my personal expectations of what constituted appropriate research. I needed to let go of the controlling influences of what I knew (or thought I knew), I needed to be fluent in my interpretation of the structured processes of learning constructed through participating in institutionised education, and I needed to question what I had taken as being important from these experiences.

Through doing a phenomenological research project, I realized that researchers can engage with research that contributes to the life satisfaction of both the researcher and the researched. We can allow research to be about self and others, truly valuing what other people say and experience, without needing to interpret or intellectualise other people's lives. As researchers we can be fully engaged in the process. We can use our ability to reflect, contemplate, and value our own personal experiences and the insights that rise within us as people. Throughout the research process we can allow our shields and defenses to be lowered. More philosophically, as we research we can also swim in a pool of wonderment and discovery, gradually circling in on something in a way that is relevant to both us and others, rather than attacking our prey with pre-determined expectations and desired outcomes.

To do this though, there is a need to relinquish some of our controlling and ordered desires that are embedded in our status as educated professionals with 'expert' knowledge. While these are valuable, they can also stand in the way of seeing something with new or fresh eyes. Though making this shift in itself is a challenge, some of the following personal reflections of engaging with the phenomenological research processes of review and insight may help shed some light on both the struggle and the joy of letting go so we can see what others see, and letting be as we acknowledge and accept ourselves and what we represent and bring to any study.

This paper is arranged as a sampling of personal reflections. Core to these musings is the idea of letting go and letting be and how these were relevant to me engaging with a phenomenological investigation of spiritual leisure experiences. Some of the personal reflections presented here are from my research journal,

others come from the dissertation itself, while others emerged as I was reflecting to write this paper. These reflections are organized under four headings which act as the structure for this paper, namely: letting go of past experiences and doubts; letting go of knowing and embracing not knowing; letting go of self, and being more open to others' experiences; and letting go of control as a researcher with a fixed idea of completion. The majority of the paper is presented as a reflective narrative focusing on my experience of doing a phenomenological study. This is interwoven with a sprinkling of phenomenological literature relevant to some of the experiences that were encountered on my research journey of letting go and letting be.

LETTING GO OF PAST EXPERIENCES AND DOUBTS

For many of us there is that gap, where we might live one thing, yet have whispers of knowing rise within us about another way. There is a gap between doing the practical and embracing what would bring meaning to our lives. Though we do not always recognize this, there can be a gap between our roles, our responsibilities and engaging a truer sense of self. As researchers, this can be evidenced as we live the gap between playing it safe and embracing the unknown. As a result we tend to research the topics that external funding agencies deem to be important rather than engaging what we know from our experience of life to be important or personally relevant. I struggled with this gap in my research path. Encouraged to 'play safe', to research the tangible and the topical, I knew within my own heart that there were other issues that were important. While these were not evidently relevant to the economic viability of the field, I believed they were meaningful and important to the philosophical and felt experience of leisure. Unfortunately my perspective was not widely shared and doubt set in. I acknowledged that service quality, issues of physical activity, processes for engaging motivating leisure experiences were useful research agendas, but so too surely was an understanding of the spiritual dimension of leisure? This was my desired path, yet to follow it I had to find the confidence to let go of the doubts others presented and the training that I had received, in order to make this study a reality. In essence I had to acknowledge the gap that existed between that which I knew and that which I desired to know:

> The gap between knowing and living.
> The gap between thought and action.
> The gap between our inner self, and
> The outer being.
>
> The gap between the light and the dark.
> The gap between masculine and feminine.
> The gap between a life of love and joy, and
> A life of pain and sorrow.
> The gap within us all.
>
> The gap is deep,
> The gap is dark,

The gap seems bottomless.
The gap is there,
The gap within us all.

I wrote this poem in the time leading into conducting my research project. Reflective of the doubt and struggle that I was living at this time, the poem demonstrates the separation I felt from things that were important. During this time I struggled to know how to be true to myself and minimize the gap between knowledge and expectation on the one hand, and emotion and epiphany on the other. To engage with this gap and to allow myself to follow my own belief of valuable research was the most significant struggle I faced. For this to occur I had to let go of a significant life companion, self-doubt. More realistically, I had to create enough life space from my self-doubts to achieve momentum with the project. This didn't occur all at once, and is still occurring within me now. The idea of letting go is not one where aspects of doubt magically evaporate. For me it was a process of acknowledging its existence, allowing the doubt to be, but not be the focus, and allowing the grip that self-doubt holds to lessen on my life to enable the research I was attempting to do. This duel process of letting go and letting be can be represented by the quote below from my personal research journaling, written as I was re-engaging with the idea of the research project:

> After letting go of some of the external and internal expectations that I had about myself as a professional, myself as an employee and myself as a educated person, my PhD topic started to take root, started to whisper from within. For quite a while I was able to avoid listening, but some voices just get louder, if not attended to. The voice related to my PhD was one of them. I need to prepare myself for going back to my PhD program… But this time I have to be more courageous, more relevant to self. I cannot be singularly guided by external expectations and what I have learned from my education and professional development (or indoctrination). I need to also be true to me!

As researchers, we need space for ourselves, for insight, or seeing something in a different way, developing new understandings and ways of interpreting our life worlds (Barnacle, 2001). We are all human, we all have our fears, concerns, self-doubts and expectations. Some of these expectations are inflated by our education, ideals and desires to make a difference. For me, letting go of some of the influences of intellectual and professional expectations, and embracing my study for personally relevant reasons, or as a personal journey was critical. Importantly it was also a process which phenomenology supports, encourages, maybe even demands of researchers. From this realisation a less pressured and more personally relevant research space formed, which allowed for engagement, discovery and finally completion, of a project that was personally relevant and professionally recognised.

LETTING GO OF KNOWING, EMBRACING NOT KNOWING AND MAYBE NEVER KNOWING

Phenomenology was born out of a critique of positivist philosophies of science which view reality as measurable and objective. In comparison with these approaches, phenomenology is concerned with the world as it presents itself to us as humans, through an examination of particular phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). As such, phenomenology is both a way of understanding the world and a method of inquiry focused on describing a phenomenon of human experience as it is lived and explained by specific individuals (Barnacle, 2001). Rather than focus on the general world, statements of measurement or distilled comments of commonality, phenomenology is founded on an assumption of the value of knowledge from the individual's perspective as they engage with the world around them (Willig, 2001). As such the phenomenological process is one of letting go (bracketing) and letting be (seeing the world as others view it, allowing the essence of experience to predominate, not our interpretations of it).

Through engaging with phenomenology I experienced the benefits of acknowledging my personal doubts and experience as a legitimate part of the research process. As an extension of acknowledging these doubts and not trying to deal with them as a problem to be solved, I was able to look beyond a 'recipe book' construction of research and accept the notion of not knowing. As a researcher I experienced the value of an open-ended process, of the voyage of discovery and contemplation, and the significant insights gained through fully engaging with a phenomenon, not distancing self, as a disconnected observer. Rather I was both an observer of others, and part of what was being observed.

For me, grappling with the theoretical concepts that inform phenomenology was both a challenging and enlightening phase of research process that led to developing new ways of looking at research and at life in general. This occurred by letting concepts and procedures sit with me, letting them become part of me, before doing anything with them. Personally this was an empowering process of making space in my life and in my head for a different way of seeing and developing insight. From this place of settled confusion my research design and the journey of engaging in phenomenological research took root. Over time and with reflection the confusing impact started to subside and I was released from a phase of immobilised duality. During this time my intellectual training and desire to play it safe was trying to suppress the new, more subtle ways of knowing, discovering and insight that were starting to evolve. As this new space was gained, the confusion settled to a point where I was able to move forward along the path of phenomenology. There was still the sea of confusion, not knowing and waves of fear, but there was now action, a direction set and a process of loose planning, designing and doing research that started to come to life.

Letting go of a desire for academic order and control was necessary to engage with phenomenology as it is tenuous, more philosophical than practical and enlived in multiple ways. While phenomenological research methods and procedures do exist, there is no single method, rather there exist variations of intent, practice and description. That this is the case is not a failing of the methodology, but instead can

be seen as an opportunity as the philosophical heritage of phenomenology allows the researcher to acknowledge the self, search for meaning, avoid the dichotomy of self and world, object and subject and to emphasise discovery, meaning and description not control, evidence and prediction. As Polkinghorne (1983) has suggested, phenomenology does not so much have a correct path to follow, but a creative approach to understanding which is appropriate to the aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Through extensive reading and reflection of phenomenology and doing qualitative research in general I was able to start to distill what my research project meant to me and what I hoped research could be. Below is an extract from my research journal that represents my own clarity of phenomenological intention as it was starting to take shape within me:

> I believe and hope that social research can be open, can be expansive and can serve to develop new and more detailed understandings of aspects of our lives. Thus, this research steps toward finding not 'the answer', but taking steps toward offering alternative understandings of leisure, spirituality and spiritual leisure experiences. More controversially, it is also reflective and embracing of open-minded options, rather than a piece of knowledgeable, focused explanation. This research is a journey of discovery about my self, about others and about being human. It is also about risk, the unknown and a process of focused chaos. Chaos, not because there is no direction or structure; chaos because the end points are not known and the process is one of unfolding surprise, not a search for what is expected.

As reflected in this statement I had come to a place where the possibility of research being open, personally relevant and locating the self within the research had started to evolve within me. From this personal foundation of awareness I was able to move forward through the initial phases of phenomenological research where the researcher focuses on self and the relationship between self and the phenomenona under investigation (Polkinghorne, 1989).

LETTING GO OF SELF, AND BEING MORE OPEN TO OTHERS

Edmund Husserl recognised the value in understanding the world from the perspective of the self. From his perspective, in order to understand the nature and meaning of things in the human world, there was a need to acknowledge 'what I think, what I feel' and not only attend to external or measurable observations (Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology requires researchers to place our understanding in abeyance, and have a fresh look at things. These processes invite us to set aside habits of thought, to see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set into our minds and to see what stands before our eyes (Husserl, 1931). By laying aside, as best as we can, the prevailing understandings of any phenomena and revisiting our immediate experiences of them, new meaning may emerge for us or we may witness at least an 'authentication and enhancement' of former meaning (Crotty, 1996). While this shift in thinking can be challenging, it can allow us to be open and fresh in our

approach to knowledge even though we remain rooted in ways of perceiving and knowing (Moustakas, 1994).

From my experience the value of this principle is that it inspires us to examine biases and enhance our openness, even if a perfect and pure state of clarity is not achieved. As I engaged in my own version of setting my habits aside through journaling, I found my awareness and realization of the importance of knowing self and to be able to know other, was increasingly realized. Yet so was my realization that I probably could never wholly eliminate my training as both a quantitative and grounded theory qualitative researcher, as a leisure management professional, or my pre-established suppositions of the phenomenon under investigation, merely reduce their impact and be truthful in their existence:

> I believe that a researcher should delve into and acknowledge their personal understanding, experiences and conceptual perspectives on that they are investigating. I do not believe that once I have come to some awareness of self relating to any issue that I can set that aside, with it no longer influencing my understanding of the concept of my desires or expectations for the study. However, reflecting on my understanding, personal experiences and how they have influenced my understanding at least brings some of my possible biases to my conscious awareness and provides a framework for more fully understanding the lifeworld of both self and others.

Journaling, reflecting and setting aside suppositions was an extensive and continuing aspect of my research project. In practice it was not only at the beginning of the study that I needed to reflect on my own impact, rather this was a progressive process. Initially I dutifully delved into my personal understandings of the concepts I wished to investigate, in this case spirituality, leisure and personal spiritual experiences. In addition however, I found I also needed to continue to address these and the foundations of my beliefs as I gained access to other people's lived experiences. As I learned more of others, I learned more of myself – what I felt, what I thought, the foundation of my beliefs, the ideas and notions that I had never questioned yet formed who I was and how I viewed the world. This was particularly apparent when I was confronted by what others said and as I sought the insight of critical friends who also interpreted the interview transcripts. Was I hearing all that was said? Were there patterns to my questioning or listening that discounted certain viewpoints? What else within me may be a barrier to seeing the world as it was lived by others? Again, journaling formed a useful part of this internally seeking process and helped to broaden, highlight and exemplify the need to set aside what we think we know, in order to discover something else. As indicated in one journal extract at the time of analyzing the initial interviews, the self-doubt returned, but it had a focused intent that was at this time edifying and not stultifying:

> Can I see what is being said? Am I really understanding that which is important to another? I have my beliefs and my understandings but these are not fixed. In the words of others I am being challenged to

> something fresh. These are not epiphanies as such, but reminders of what is within me – I am the Catholic school boy, I am the new age man, I am hopeful and inclusive, but can I be non-judgmental as well? Be open, don't assume, ask questions that are queries of good intent and not confrontational. In these ways I hear more and learn more. All that we know is within us, we just have to open the door.

The interpretive researcher is expected to approach the research with an open attitude and to accommodate a range of possible outcomes so that the different understandings of people engaged in a situation can be revealed (Neuman, 1997; Patton, 1990). Through engaging in processes of intentional reflection and recognition of my own biases I was able to alter my own state of mind that sought for answers, and attain a more open frame of reference that questioned my current understanding and how this was developed. From this awareness I found I did not need to be as unconsciously influenced by my learned understandings and that I could look at the phenomenon in a more open manner.

LETTING GO OF RESEARCHER CONTROL AND OF HAVING A FIXED IDEA OF COMPLETION

The intention of phenomenological data gathering is to search for descriptions of an experience, not to determine any individual's independent reality. Subsequently, the protocols needed for phenomenological research "are descriptions of what presents in a person's consciousness when he or she attends to the particular experience under investigation" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 50). Thus, the outcome of data collection procedures is a collection of experiential descriptions.

Phenomenology uses an unstructured interview format, asking one open ended question at the beginning of the interview and then developing other questions from the person's response (Becker, 1992). After asking the opening question, the researcher suspends further structuring. While this seems to be a sufficiently clear process, in the initial phase of data collection I struggled with actualizing the intent. Instead, I found I had a more rational mind-set that tested both the relevance of my proposed study and the ideas of doing a phenomenological study. This is where the influence of my historical research training became obvious to me. I went into the initial interviews with a semi-structured interview schedule, expecting to be able to get an extensive description of a particular experience and investigate the underlying meanings and interpretations of the concepts that I believed influences such experiences. Thankfully as the interviews evolved I started to let go of the need for the interview schedule, asked my initial interview question to each of the co-researchers, and allowed the interview to flow. By this time I had learned the value of giving the co-researchers the space to approach the topic in a way that was relevant for them, not reflective of my need to control the interview or achieve a certain type of data in a certain way.

As van Manen (1990) has pointed out "making something of a text or of lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure … understanding is not a rule bound process but

a free act of 'seeing' meaning" (p. 7). My personal experience of phenomenological analysis is mirrored in the words of Moustakas, (1994, p. 65) who stated:

> As I come to a closing place in this reflective and meditative journey I am alive with images and ideas, struck with the wonder of passionately discovering that the only way I can truly come to know things and people is to go out to them, to return again and again to them, to immerse myself completely in what is there before me, look, see, listen, hear, touch, from many angles and perspectives and vantage points, each time freshly so that there will be continual openings and learnings that will connect with each other and with prior perceptions, understandings and future possibilities. In other words I must immerse myself totally and completely in my world, take in what is offered without bias or prejudgement. I must pause and consider what my own life is and means, in conscious awareness, in thought, in reflection.

I too had to reach the same realizations and from this less planned, directed and controlled manner of engaging with data, a range of insights were developed. To begin I realized that it is not possible to know the answers and hold to a pre-determined framework if we are to truly be open to others experiences. To know what others know, to learn and gauge a perspective of others experiences of a phenomenon, we must be open to deferring to their expertise. Each of us knows what we know within ourselves. To research beyond the self therefore, requires both giving and willing co-researchers, and the time and space to share that understanding together. More practically, I also learned that the research process is not just about others, it is about self.

While not all research methodologies require the same level of self-reflection necessary in phenomenology, it is clear that we always bring ourselves to our research. What differs is the extent to which we embed that self, acknowledge that self, and set that self aside in the search for meaning and understanding. For me, the research process required that I let go of myself as the controller of the research, but to also let my truer self evolve and be seen. To set ourselves aside, we must first know who we are. Perhaps most truthfully, research is about recognizing this first before we can honestly know who others are and how they experience. Moustakas (1994) suggests that phenomenological researchers must endeavour to set aside predispositions and that they are asked to look at events and people with fresh eyes, to see them as they are, openly and as they present themselves. As I reflected on my own journey of research engagement and discovery I found that not only did I come to better understand the essence of spiritual leisure experiences for others, I came to know and be more of my own self as well:

> By being self today,
> We become self.
> By embracing and loving who we are now,
> We become self.
> Our infinite self.

Let go of the illusion of the known.
Embrace the self of the unknown.
The self from within.
The self from our spirit.
The self aligned to the infinite.

We are not separate from life.
By participating in life.
Knowing self in the moment.
Being and expressing self in our life.
Accepting that life and self will change.
Embracing the infinite love, peace and faith within.
Being and becoming is life.
And life is living the process of being and becoming.
Letting go and letting be.

This extract is representative of one point of insight and personal clarity gained and expressed by me as a researcher and as a person throughout the process of doing phenomenology. The process of being able to express the possible essences of an experience occurred as a continual aspect of the research process. For me, the experience of research was one of spiraling through phases of enthusiastic engagement, leading to confusion, intellectualisation, letting go, contemplation, phases of knowing, not knowing and occasional insight. Combined, these led to the possibility of being able to know others through knowing self, and the ability to study the experience of spiritual leisure as it presents itself to people in their conscious knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The process of sharing and listening to other people's experiences of life, allowing the space to be open to the experiences of others, and reflecting and contemplating on the relevance of these to self and being human, was a deeply fulfilling experience as a researcher. Moustakas (1994) suggested the whole process of being with something, being within ourselves, being within others, and correlating these outer and inner experiences and meanings is infinite, endless, and eternal. This is the beauty of knowledge and discovery. It keeps us forever awake, alive and connected with what matters in life. For me this process was also about letting go of self-doubt, facing my fears, trusting what I felt and knew inside me, and allowing myself to be a little more whole and true to self. All this occurred within the context of being a researcher and being within a university setting.

Overall my experience of doing a phenomenological research project was one of death and re-birth, of letting go of ideas, concepts and ways of being and doing, and allowing space for something to be born. In effect this meant allowing aspects of myself to grow and to be allowed to go outside the realms of more commonly used research methods.

Through this I found that overcoming challenges, embracing and allowing aspects of myself to be and becoming part of the research was incredibly empowering. There was the empowerment of allowing more of who I am be a greater aspect of my professional life, my research, what I do and the way I do things. By doing phenomenological research I gained the realisation that who I am is something to embrace, acknowledge, celebrate, allow to grow and can be an integral part of the research process.

Who we are as people has significant influence on the research we do and how we approach doing research. It can drive our research, it can hinder our research and affect the satisfaction we gain from doing research. I found to be an effective researcher using phenomenology I needed to become more consciously aware of my own self, what forces have influenced this, and how all of these related to the research I was intending to do. This was not something I engaged in only during early phases of the research, it was a continual aspect of the research. Through engaging with phenomenology my personal and professional self began to take shape, as each were given space to become legitimate aspects of the study. Who I am was out in the light, my influence, desires, instincts, feelings, relevance and insights were embraced and these were celebrated as part of the research in a legitimate and open manner.

While there needs to be a place for different ways of knowing and different ways of exploring, just collecting information without placing it in the context of the lived experience can lead to information for information's sake, removed from the human experience. As Baudrillard (1988), warned, "[w]e live in a universe where there is more and more information and less and less meaning" (p. 95). Through reattaching to the human self and exploring the meaning of experience as it is lived, not how we think it should be lived, perhaps the link back to meaningful information can be made and people's connectedness with knowledge developed.

Research can be a personally rewarding and relevant experience, an experience that re-affirms what it means to be human, for both the researcher and the researched. Though no one research method provides all answers to how this may be done, the reality that is often forgotten is the human. We are thinking, reflective and conscious beings who live our lives in actions and emotions and who are formed by the cumulative pool of our cognitive, spiritual, physical and sensual experiences. To capture this complexity we at times need to let ourselves into the study and look into the self. Before this can occur however we also need to let go of that which we think we know, be more vulnerable in our interactions and let ourselves be. Phenomenology offers one way of doing this and though not appropriate for all research needs, should be considered when we truly want to touch and understand that which is most meaningful to us as individuals.

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