

Practicing Phenomenological Research
QUAL 9800
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Aderhold 319

Course Description

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences...[it] does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. (Van Manen, 2001, p. 9)

Conducting human science research that reflects this vision of phenomenology requires that the researcher consider a number of important issues and topics, many of which will be explored in this doctoral research course.

Issues and Topics:

- Phenomenological research in the broader geo-philosophical communities of qualitative research, including how it is similar to and different from other traditions such as auto-ethnography, hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, narrative inquiry, and self-study--which also consider human experience.
- The nature of a phenomenon and what it means to say one is studying a phenomenon.
- Key philosophical tenets used in phenomenological research including the lifeworld, intentionality, openness, intersubjectivity, and immediacy.
- The two primary approaches used to conduct phenomenological research--descriptive and hermeneutic.
- Guiding principles for conducting phenomenological research and how these principles can be enacted in research practice
- Concrete ways in which these research practices can help one gain a deeper understanding of experiences in various human science fields including but by no means limited to education, counseling, social work, nursing, psychology, and sociology.

Pedagogical Commitments

Consistent (Signature) Practices

What Gadamer (1995) warns against is conceiving of method as ‘following a marked route’, which he points out as the original Greek meaning of the word. If a researcher follows a ‘marked route’, i.e., adheres to a previously determined method step by step, then openness is at stake and the possibility of truly understanding the phenomenon is seriously undermined. (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008, p. 112)

We will talk a lot about how phenomenological research (the way I embrace it) is an “approach” rather than a “method.” Avoiding lock-step procedures and still proceeding thoughtfully and systematically is an artistic endeavor that requires significant, disciplined practice. During each class session we will experience at least one--and oftentimes more than one--of the following signature practices in conducting phenomenological research. My hope is that by *practicing these practices* you will become more attuned to how to see, think, write, and listen phenomenologically.

- Seeing Phenomenologically—We will practice observing phenomena by watching segments of films and by going on phenomenon walks. We will work on how we can make note of what we “see” and how we can learn how to *see what frames our seeing* (Lather, 1993)
- Thinking Phenomenologically—Through our discussions of class readings we will practice the art of not making definite, what is indefinite.
- Writing Phenomenologically—We will practice writing lived experience descriptions (LEDs), fictional-in-imagination accounts of lived experiences, and bridling entries.
- Listening Phenomenologically—We will practice how to listen well when conducting open-ended phenomenological interviews.

Pedagogical Considerations & Commitments as We Approach this Research Approach

1. **Being Perplexed:** It is not only ok to be perplexed, it is desirable. In trying to describe some of Heidegger’s ideas, David Cerbone (2008) writes the following:

Heidegger...sees as his principal challenge in *Being and Time* to be one of bringing his readers to the point of feeling perplexed, of finding the ‘question of being’ an occasion of puzzlement. Without that perplexity, without being struck both by the question of being and our inability to answer it immediately, Heidegger’s investigation cannot even begin to make sense, much less appear compelling, even vital. So...I want to suggest that perplexity in the face of Heidegger’s philosophy is a good thing, something to be cultivated and investigated, and so a reader who finds herself perplexed should be praised as long as she is willing to see in that perplexity a reason to continue rather than simply put Heidegger’s writings aside. (p. xii)

So, if you find yourself perplexed you are in good shape. If you do not, please ask yourself why?

2. **The Ph in PhD:** As you know, the Ph in PhD stands for philosophy. I interpret this signification literally and am passionate about it. It is important to learn how to read, write, and think philosophically in order to practice this research. This is not to say that we are doing or becoming

philosophers. Rather, it means we must learn as much as we can from philosophers as we study and practice our research.

3. **Theory-Practice Divide:** Great practice is already, always being theorized; great theorizing is already, always being practiced. No matter where you imagine yourself when you are done with your PhD (e.g., professorship, practitioner in your respective field) I think this degree should demand certain things of those who have earned the letters. You should act as a leader; you should be one who generates and creates; you should be one that particularizes and contextualizes; and you should be one who never stops thinking—really thinking. Moreover, in this class you are learning a practice—how to practice phenomenological research.
 4. **Explaining Confusing Material Ethos**—I am less interested in explaining confusing things to you, and more interested in working THROUGH confusing things WITH you. We are all growing in our understandings—and are at different points relative to what we hope to accomplish. Like *meaning*, understanding is always shifting, moving, expanding, contracting, and is infinite. The ethos I would like to have us experience in this pedagogic space might be best characterized as a *Sharing of our Growing Understanding*. Which means, I will readily share where I am at in my growing understanding with you (sometimes through mini-lecture and more often in discussion and workshop) as I want you to share where your growing understanding with your classmates and me.
 5. **“Just Tell Me What to Do Already!” Phenomenon**—Related to point #4, you may at times find yourself wanting me to provide you with a step-by-step recipe of what to do. I will certainly provide you with tools and suggestions (i.e., I will “tell” you things). However, in order to practice phenomenological research well you must at the very least tolerate, and better yet embrace, ambiguity. You must be willing to read, write, re-read, re-write, think, re-think, discuss, and discuss again what you are learning about the phenomenon under investigation. There will be contradictions and frustrations, but in the end there will be satisfaction.
 6. **Course Format**—We will read and write our way through the core content of the course together in the first half of the semester. During the second half of the semester, we will divide into 2 or 3 groups in order to particularize a bit more in Workshop. Workshops will be more application oriented, will focus on re-reading for depth, and will involve a significant amount of writing.
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Readings

Required Texts

- Moran, D., & Mooney, T. (Eds.) (2002). *The phenomenology reader*. Routledge: New York.
- van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Althouse Press: London: Ontario, Canada
- Dahlberg, K., Dahlberg, H., & Nystrom, M. (2008). *Reflective lifeworld research*. Studentlitteratur: Lund, Sweden

* There will be additional required readings posted to eLearning Commons.

Re-Readings

You will make this choice by October 15

Note: For additional readings please see the appended reading list.

Tentative Schedule

(Note: This syllabus is a guide for the course. It is subject to change as we progress through the semester. You will be notified in advance of any changes.)

Date	Activity/Topic	Class Preparation/ Assignments Due
August 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Course • Syllabus • Mini-Lecture—Phenomenology Overview • Overview of Texts • Practice “Signature Practices” 	
August 27	Situating Phenomenological Research within Qualitative Research	Read: Articles (eLearning Commons) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macbeth—reflexivity, ethnomethodology • Hamilton, Smith, Worthington—narrative, self-study, auto-ethnography • Giorgi—descriptive phenomenology • Dahlberg—“balanced” phenomenological approach • Barkway—nursing phenomenology • McNamara—nursing phenomenology Write: Bridling Journal Entry #1
September 3	Establishing Philosophical Grounds for Phenomenological Research—Part I	Read: Phenomenology Reader (PR) 1-26; 35-50; 78-108 http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/2.html

		Write: Bridling Journal Entry #2
September 10	Establishing Philosophical Grounds for Phenomenological Research—Part 2 Peer Editing of Phenomenology Brief	Read: PR 257-277; 314-338; 377-381; 421-435; 529-540. Phenomenology Brief –1st draft due

September 17	Practicing an Interpretive Approach—Part 1	Read: Researching Lived Experience (RLE) pp. 1-76 Write: Bridling Journal Entry #3
September 24	Practicing an Interpretive Approach—Part 2	Read: Researching Lived Experience (RLE) pp. 77-174 Write: Bridling Journal Entry #4 Bridling Journal Check
October 1	Practicing a (Balanced) Descriptive Approach—Part 1 Peer Editing of Phenomenology Brief	Read: Reflective Lifeworld Approach (RLA), pp. 23-120 Phenomenology Brief – 2nd draft due
October 8	Practicing a (Balanced) Descriptive Approach—Part 2	Read: Reflective Lifeworld Approach (RLA) pp. 121-228 Write: Bridling Journal Entry #5
October 15	Practicing a Post-Intentional Phenomenological Research Approach	Read: Vagle readings (eLearningCommons) Phenomenological Research Approach Guidelines Workshop Contract Due Phenomenological Interview Due
October 22	Phenomenology Workshop (in groups)	Read: Contracted Examples http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/articles/biblio.html

		On writing: http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/61.html Write: Bridling Journal Entry #6
October 29	Phenomenology Workshop (in groups)	Read: Contracted
November 5	Phenomenology Workshop (in groups)	Read: Contracted Write: Bridling Journal Entry #7 Phenomenology Brief – Final draft due
November 12	Phenomenology Workshop (in groups)	Read: Contracted Write: Bridling Journal Entry #8
November 19	Phenomenology Workshop (whole class)	Read: Contracted Write: Bridling Journal Entry #9
November 26	NO CLASS— Thanksgiving Break	
December 3	Online Meeting	Bridling Journals Due
December 10		Contracted Final Papers Due

Summary of Assignments and Activities

(Note: The summaries below are general descriptions of the course assignments/activities. I will distribute more specific descriptions throughout the semester as appropriate.)

Phenomenology Brief—You will write a phenomenology brief (2-3 pages, single-spaced). The brief will include the following components:

1. A statement of what you take *intentionality* to mean—drawing on at least one philosopher to help you make your case.
2. A discussion of how your understanding of intentionality can be used to examine a particular phenomenon of interest.

We will work on this assignment throughout the semester--writing, re-writing, and editing one another's work. Toward the end of the semester (**November 5**), we will compile the briefs and try to get our collective work published.

Bridling Journal—We all have pre-understandings, assumptions, and biases. However, in order to understand something more fully and/or in ways that we may not have understood at all, we must not allow our pre-understandings, assumptions, and biases to take hold of us and limit our research openness. In phenomenology, the notion of bridling (instead of bracketing) has begun to gain some traction. We will practice bridling in our journals.

Your journal should be word processed and single-spaced. It is to serve at least two purposes. First, I want it to be a “collection” – a place where you can continually return (in this class and, especially, afterward) as you re-imagine your research interests. Second, I want it to be an “active space”—a place where you can play with ideas, words, wonderings, conflicts, and questions. To this end, your journal writing needs to be clear, but not tidy. I want to be able to follow it, but I don't want it neatly packaged. We will talk more about what this means.

Each Journal entry (9 total) will include the following components:

1. Dictionary Entries

As we read together, I want you to pay special attention to the terms/notions that confuse and/or intrigue you. You will write the term/notion, an excerpt or two that provides a context for how the term is being used, and what you take the term to mean (you may go to other sources for assistance). Make at least 5 dictionary entries for each journal entry. Keep them concise.

2. Bridling Statement

In each journal entry, identify at least one idea/issue/problem/concept that matters to you. Then, write as much as you can about what you assume, think, and believe about it. Be honest. Use this as a space to question what you believe and assume and to try to figure out what has framed your beliefs and assumptions. Pay particular attention to what you notice about your *assumptions of normality*. I can't imagine doing this well in less than 1 page (single spaced).

You will send me (via ELC email) the first four entries on **September 24** and the remainder on **December 3**.

Phenomenological Interview—You will conduct a short (20-30 minute) phenomenological interview. You will audiotape and transcribe it, receive feedback from me, and practice some data analysis. The interviews will be approved under a class IRB—which means that you cannot publish off the interview. I will provide you with more information about this process. (**Due October 15**)

Phenomenology Workshop Contract--During the second half of the semester we will organize in 2 or 3 groups for workshop. As part of the workshop, you and I will negotiate and then contract what you will *re-read*, additional readings, and what you will write as a final, culminating paper. Contracts will be particularized, but will be consistent in terms of workload. (**Due October 15**)

Note: All assignments will be submitted via email (eLearning Commons). Additionally, all feedback will be emailed through eLearning Commons.

Evaluation of Student Performance

Ann Davies (2007) contends that when “evaluative feedback is decreased, and specific, descriptive feedback is increased, students learn more” (p. 33). The specific, descriptive feedback to which Davies refers is often termed formative assessment, because it is forward looking and aims to constantly promote student learning. Davies suggests that this type of feedback actually “feeds-forward.” It can be said, then, that assessments should serve, primarily, as beginnings rather than endings.

To these ends, your work will be assessed primarily in a formative manner and to a lesser degree in a summative (evaluative) manner. You will receive specific, descriptive feedback (sometimes through the use of digital audiofiles and other times through track changes/insert comments) and a letter grade for each assignment. You can choose to revise and resubmit any assignment based on your feedback to improve a letter grade, as long as your revisions are submitted no later than one week after you receive the feedback.

There are no points for assignments. Instead, a description of the attributes which constitute letter grades will be provided (e.g., A means...). Your final course grade will be based on a holistic assessment of all assignments you complete throughout the semester. Here are the possible letter grades: A; A-; B+; B; B-; C+; C; C-; F

Extra work submitted to enhance a course grade will not be accepted.

Late Assignments – Submitting your work after the deadline may influence your course grade. If for some reason you need an extension contact me.

Attendance Policy

Your attendance is imperative.

1. Notify me prior to any absence.
2. In the event you are absent, you will be required to complete an alternative assignment.
3. Being late to class or leaving early three times is equivalent to missing one class meeting.
4. Students are excused for religious holidays.
5. You are responsible for all class meetings (e.g. assignments, content) whether present or not.
6. Absences may affect your final course grade.

Academic Honesty

The University of Georgia’s policies on academic honesty are strictly enforced in this class (see the UGA Graduate Bulletin). Please familiarize yourself with these policies.

Equity and Accessibility

It is my goal to fully include everyone in our classroom. If you have any special circumstances that you believe may affect your performance in class or on the course requirements, please meet with me to make

the necessary accommodations. I will try to maintain complete confidentiality of any information that you choose to share with me.



The University of Georgia

**College of Education
Conceptual Framework**

The College of Education prepares exemplary, reflective professionals to serve a diverse global community; it achieves that end through teaching, scholarship, outreach, and partnership at the local, national, and international levels.

Acknowledgements

* The dictionary and re-reading activities/assignments are adapted from Dr. Bettie St. Pierre's (fall 2007) course, ELAN 8045- Theoretical Frameworks for Doctoral Studies in the Human Sciences. Retrieved on June 4, 2008 from http://www.coe.uga.edu/syllabus/elan/ELAN_8565_StPierre_B_f07.pdf

Additional Readings List

Cerbone, D. R. (2008) Heidegger: A guide for the perplexed. Continuum: New York.

Crotty, M. (1996). Phenomenology and nursing research. Churchill Livingstone: Melbourne, Australia.

Dagenais, J. J. (1972). *Models of man: A phenomenological critique of some paradigms in the human sciences*. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff.

Giorgi, A. (2009). The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach. Duquesne University Press: Pittsburgh: PA.

Giorgi, A. (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. (1970). *Psychology as a human science: A phenomenology-based approach*. New York: Harper & Row.

Heap, J. L. (1991). "Ethnomethodology, cultural phenomenology, and literacy activities." *Curriculum Inquiry*2(1): 109-117.

Holstein, J. A. and J. F. Gubrium (1998). Phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and interpretive practice. *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage: 137-157.

Lawn, C. (2006) Gadamer: A guide for the perplexed. Continuum: New York.

Kvale, S. (1983). The qualitative research interview: A phenomenological and a hermeneutical mode of understanding. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 14(2), 171-196.

- Matthews, E. (2006) Merleau-Ponty: A guide for the perplexed. Continuum: New York.
- Melrose, L. (1989). *The creative personality and the creative process: A phenomenological perspective*. Lanham, MD, University Press of America.
- Moran, D., (2000). Introduction to phenomenology. Routledge: New York
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Oiler, C. (1982). "The phenomenological approach in nursing research." *Nursing Research***31**: 178-181.
- Russell, M. (2006) Husserl: A guide for the perplexed. Continuum: New York.
- Shutz, A. (1967). The phenomenology of the social world. G. Walsh & F. Lehnert (Trans.). Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL.
- Schutz, A. & Luckmann, T. (1973). The structures of the life-world. R. M. Zaner & H. T. Engelhardt, Jr. (Trans.). Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL.
- Thompson, C. J., W. B. Locander, et al. (1989). "Putting consumer experience back into consumer research: The philosophy and method of existential phenomenology." *Journal of Consumer Research***16**(2): 133-146.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Research lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario, State University of New York Press.