THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL HEART OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Foreword

This book began during one of the conversations that takes place in the weekly, two-hour meetings of the Transdisciplinary Phenomenology Research Group at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. At these meetings, faculty and graduate student members from across campus gather to focus on the meaning of the first-person experiences reported by research participants in transcribed interviews. And we make space to acknowledge, share, and then set aside our personal connections to the phenomenon of focus. For example, when analyzing data from a study about teaching and learning, Distinguished Professor Howard Pollio (one of our authors and the focus of the extensive case study presented in this book), confessed his lack of interest in evidence-based pedagogy. His comments startled TPRG members from the field of educational psychology for two reasons.

First, for over 30 years, students from across campus would enroll in his advanced doctoral seminar on *existential phenomenological psychology* and then advise others, "Take this course. It will change your life!" Every year, busy faculty members would make time to join students and Howard—many returning to sit in on the course in later semesters. But, second, there was a deeper and less comfortable reason. For Howard's comment raised questions about the relevance and importance of evidence-based research concerning pedagogy.

Professor of Educational Psychology Kathy Greenberg (one of our authors) and members of her doctoral research team began to ask questions of each other: Should we be questioning the relevance of the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education? What kind of teaching framework, if any, had Howard developed without any thought to the scholarship of teaching and learning? Had his intuitive style included elements more traditional approaches had missed? Many well-known scholars have written about the art of teaching as intuitive, situational, reflective, and/or mindful, and others have written of the need to create a framework or theory of teaching out of one's practice—to develop a praxis. Hence, Kathy believed we had a near-perfect example of higher education teaching and learning to explore—one in which the teacher was unencumbered by evidence-based teaching practices yet clearly and consistently provided a transformational learning experience.

But this was not a typical project in which the researcher or research group all share the same sociocultural professional views of their discipline. We deliberately took advantage of the transdisciplinarity of TPRG to develop a collaborative approach to our questions about the relationship of theory to practice and intuition to intentionality in our teaching. Our time together in this research group first gave

us a shared vocabulary. And it also enabled us to honor the phenomenological understanding that perception both opens us to phenomena within the world as well as binds us to worldviews. We wanted to challenge each other's assumptions to which we might otherwise be blind.

The members of the TPRG that agreed to work together to write this book vary greatly from each other in life experiences. Two of us spent our younger lives in the Northeast, two in the Midwest, one in the Southeast and one in the Southwest. Four of us hold graduate degrees in education but each with subtle yet important differences in our focus on pedagogy. Three of us have held teaching licenses and bring to this project the influences from our experience teaching children and youth. Another of us, also from an applied field of study, spent 15 years as a practicing nurse. At the same time, two of us come from non-applied fields having spent their entire careers in academia, one in psychology and the other in the interdisciplinary field of ethology that blends psychology and biology. Further, four of our authors began their college studies as first-generation students. Two of us consider our undergraduate experience as rough. Only the parents of only one of our authors held advanced (doctoral) degrees. Two of us have taught for 7 and 10 years in higher education, while the other four have 35 or more years of teaching experience. In regard to the use of a phenomenological approach to research, three of us have done so for 20 or more years, one for 7 years, and 2 others as interested but less involved until this project. All six authors have a high regard for an interdisciplinary focus, some with more involvement than others. Finally, four authors participated throughout the project while two joined much later, bringing fresh worldviews to challenge our assumptions.

We invited others to join our authors as part of our research team. These people contributed time in analysis of our case study data. They included doctoral students and faculty engaged in scholarly study from the fields of child and family studies, cultural studies, teacher education, educational psychology, ethology, nursing, philosophy, psychology, and special education. Several of them participated in conference presentations and were co-authors on published articles related to the project. One served as our primary research assistant during the two semesters in which we collected data and went on to complete her dissertation on Howard's preparation for teaching.

We gathered data for the case study during the last two years that Howard taught —at a time when he had honed his approach to a very high level. He was very involved in the case study and the planning of the text. He provided invaluable input but due to illness, he was unable to participate in the actual writing of this text.

Together, we wrote this book in a collaborative fashion from our trans-disciplinary and sociocultural perspectives. While members took on the job of writing the first draft of one or more chapters, all of us read and edited the entire narrative to ensure we speak as one voice. Through the sharing of the phenomenological attitude, we have reviewed philosophy, analyzed data, interpreted findings, developed principles of our approach, and adapted them to guide our own unique teaching practices. We

became, as Dillard (2015) wrote about improvisational jazz musicians, "Improvisation is about seeking connection. ... It feels safe and exciting at the same time. It's like together, somehow you can open yourselves to the spirit ... and create work that you could never create on your own in a million years."

This has been a profound experience for us all, bringing us to richer insights about ourselves as well as a deep appreciation for the remarkable privilege of contributing to each other's understanding of teaching and learning, to the trustworthiness of our findings and related implications. It is our intent to communicate all of this to you as well.

Acknowledgments

Contributors

Katherine H. Greenberg is Professor Emerita, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where her scholarly interests focus on theoretical approaches to teaching and learning including phenomenology. She received her PhD from Peabody College of Vanderbilt University and was a Fulbright Research Scholar in Israel (1986–1987), where she worked with theorist Reuven Feuerstein. She is the founding director of one of 12 educational models included in the U.S.D.E. National Follow Through Program (1988–1995), partnering with educators in elementary schools serving children from low-income families. Subsequently, she has consulted in more than six countries to share her model, *Cognitive Enrichment Advantage*, for use in K-12 as well as post-secondary settings. Along with her own research and writing, she has directed numerous doctoral dissertations in Educational Psychology as well as developed several graduate degree programs. She joined the Transdisciplinary Phenomenology Research Group in 2000.

Neil B. Greenberg is Professor Emeritus, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His PhD is from Rutgers University in psychology and zoology. After five years as a post-doctoral fellow and research ethologist conducting research in behavioral neurology at the National Institute of Mental Health, he joined the faculty at Tennessee, where he continued research, taught, and directed a large curriculum revision in integrative biology; subsequently he became chair of the campus-wide University Studies Interdisciplinary Faculty and Curriculum Development Program. He was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for his interdisciplinary efforts on behalf of biology and the humanities. He remains active in teaching and writing.

Howard R. Pollio received his PhD from The University of Michigan and joined the faculty of the Department of Psychology at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he now serves as Professor Emeritus. He is the recipient of numerous awards for research and teaching. His research emphasizes Human Learning, Symbolic Processes, Figurative Language, Humor and Laughter, Qualitative Methodology, and, especially, Existential Phenomenology. He has published several books, over 100 articles and books, and has directed over 70 dissertations and served on many doctoral committees. For more than 25 years, he mentored faculty members and students as a co-leader of the

Transdisciplinary Phenomenology Research Group and facilitator of his own research team.

John T. Smith is an Associate Professor in the Mathematics Department at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, Tennessee. He teaches developmental and introductory undergraduate mathematics and statistics courses. He is also a faculty fellow with the Pellissippi Academic Center for Excellence first-year experience initiative. In 2016, he received his PhD in teacher preparation with a concentration in mathematics education through the Theory and Practice in Teacher Education Department at The University of Tennessee. His research explored the transformative learning experiences of previously unsuccessful low socioeconomic status community college students. His research is informed by an equity focus through the lens of social class, with a particular emphasis on Appalachian first-generation and non-traditional college students.

Brian K. Sohn is an Assistant Professor of Education at Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City, Tennessee. He was a student participant in the case study course of key focus in this book. He then joined the research team, conducting extensive research on the professors' and students' teaching and learning experiences. Brian earned his doctorate from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2016. His research focuses on phenomenology as a research methodology, on teaching and learning that contributes to transformative learning, and experiences of students leading to, and the application of, a phenomenological approach to teacher education.

Sandra P. Thomas is the Sara and Ross Croley Endowed Professor in the College of Nursing at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she serves as director of the PhD program. She has over 100 publications and an acclaimed book, *Listening to Patients*, which she co-authored with Howard R. Pollio. She is a founding member of the Transdisciplinary Phenomenology Research Group. Together with Howard R. Pollio, Sandra has mentored many faculty members and students as they learned to use phenomenological methodology. She also teaches qualitative methodology courses. Along with colleagues, she developed an online doctoral program in nursing and continues to teach in the program. She also directs many dissertations as well as serves on doctoral committees across the campus.

Abstract

In this volume the authors present a phenomenological approach to teaching and learning in higher education. Guided by the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the aim of the approach is to bring more explicit awareness to the lifeworlds of teachers and students in order to balance the utilitarian needs of workforce preparation with the wonder and natural motivation provided by a phenomenological attitude. The theoretical constructs of existential phenomenology are complemented by research from integrative biology, a two-year case study of a successful professor and his students, and other studies. Using a phenomenological methodology, the authors describe the professor's planning and teaching style and analyze transcribed episodes of classroom conversation. Authors discuss how the professor enacted a phenomenological attitude that honored the lifeworld of the classroom while facilitating dialogue that enabled students to weave personally relevant experiences with course content. Also included are studies of the experiences of the students that provide key insights into the relational nature of transformative learning. Additionally, the broad applicability of the phenomenological approach is exemplified with examples of course descriptions that include traditional and online course delivery and work with marginalized and traditionally underserved student populations. The volume concludes with principles of a phenomenological approach that can enrich and enable the unique connoisseurship of teachers' pedagogical practices in higher education.

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The Lifeworld of the Classroom

Rarely do we teachers in higher education consider the dynamic processes involved in the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of the classroom: "[T]he world of lived experience inhabited by us as conscious beings and incorporating the way in which phenomena (events, objects, emotions) appear to us in our conscious experience or everyday life" (Brooks, 2015, p. 642).

For the primary job of higher education teachers is to impart to students the objective, analytical, and abstract knowledge of our fields of study. Hence, this objectivism turns our attention away from our subjective perceptions. And we contend (along with many phenomenologists) these subjective perceptions are the only way we initially connect with the world and what we know of it. Indeed, we authors (who are also higher education teachers) believe attention to the lifeworld in relation to course content opens teachers and their learners to a deeper realization of abstract knowledge and its meaning in their personal and professional lives.

Picture these brief descriptions of experiences shared by a professor and his students:

Students: I feel I am in it. I am helping to create it and it is helping to create me.... It is seeping into a lot of other areas of my life. (Sonia) I really didn't feel like a student. I felt like a learner. (Lois)

Professor: My intent is to go somewhere—where students want to go—[to focus on] what stands out to them. To find an answer to some BIG question related to the topic of that session.... I know certain places that I want to go. We go, and we get there. My job is to show them how they can get themselves there. It's the revelation of self.

Students: I think there's a challenge to be more engaged with everything ... like little things throughout your day even, and just kind of like seeing those things in your life. (James) It's given me a different way to look at the world. (Lois)

Professor: It flows and most everybody's looking at you or toward the person who is talking. And they're not talking to anybody else. And I think that basically, there is no resistance in the class. It's going better than you would ever hope. You've got someplace where you never expected.

What could be more gratifying to any teacher than for students to experience a course as these student quotes indicate? And how can we as teachers understand the

teaching that fostered such experiences? We, the authors, have explored the answers to these questions through detailed descriptions of the lifeworld of the classroom. By hearing the voices of students and teachers, by foregrounding their first-person perspectives, we believe that research can uncover the heart of teaching and learning.

Lived experiences of students and teachers are frequently ignored by researchers focused on pedagogy. Some of these researchers consider such accounts too subjective or anecdotal. Hence, the implications for evidenced-based methods for teaching are presented objectively, as if those methods represented universal truths. Yet in this book we present an *existential phenomenological approach* to teaching and learning in higher education. It is an approach in which the science of teaching does not supersede its art, an approach based primarily in the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) that fosters deep connections between the personal subjective experiences of teachers and students and the abstract theoretical knowledge of course content.

Our approach and the way we present it is intended to provide principles that encourage every teacher to determine their own intuitive style to address the fluid context that is the lifeworld of their particular classroom (see Chapter 9). Unlike much literature offering approaches for higher education pedagogy, where rationality receives attention while intuition is ignored, in our approach we honor both. For teachers who aspire to use best practices frequently find that recommended techniques do not work as planned because they ignore the lifeworld of a specific classroom and the intermingled, subjective perspectives of a unique group of students. The science of teaching without the art can never be truly successful. On the other hand, combining the lifeworld with best practices can lead to startling improvements in teaching (see Box 1.1).

Box 1.1 Reflection, *Kathy Greenberg*

I experienced a powerful transformation in my teaching after participating on a research team focused on the lived experience of black university students on a predominately white campus (Davis et al., 2004; see also Chapter 8). Prior to that research project, I had spent 20 years teaching, researching, and consulting on the effectiveness of an educational approach to help marginalized students, primarily African Americans, develop personalized strategies for school learning. Nevertheless, with the Davis et al. research, I felt I was able for the very first time to walk in the shoes of marginalized students, if only for a few brief moments. Through this research project I developed a much deeper level of understanding as I reflected on the students' lifeworld *from their perspectives*. It dramatically changed my teaching.

To be sure, traditional research in teaching and learning has led to an extensive

and valuable literature related to higher education pedagogy. Some of these texts offer principles or techniques derived from implications of research findings about effective learning (e.g., Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010). Some texts share pedagogical approaches based on implications from fields of study such as brain research (e.g., Taylor & Marienau, 2016). Still others combine implications from personal experience and related research (e.g., James & Brookfield, 2014; Weimer, 2013). These authors discuss their pedagogical ideas from their unique perspectives and often provide examples from classroom settings.

We the authors of this book do not reject such research. But when we examine phenomenological research based on teachers' and students' first-person descriptions of their experiences in teaching and learning contexts, we discover a broader focus on aspects of learning beyond the utilitarian focus of acquisition of knowledge and skills. In this book, we look beneath the surface—to the phenomenological heart of teaching and learning—to provide a balanced approach to researching the living, dynamic, and sensitive system of the lifeworld of the classroom. (Note: Some readers may be wondering why we use the term *teacher* to describe higher education "instructors" and/or "professors." See Box 1.2 for our explanation.)

Box 1.2 Labels Matter: Teacher vs. Instructor

We chose to focus on the more concrete role of *teaching* and move away from the underlying meaning of *instructing*. For instructing implies lack of interest in the lifeworld of the classroom. It also implies lack of balance between first-person experience and the utilitarian focus on mastery of abstract knowledge and skills. The only exception in labels we chose to use when referring to those who teach in higher education is our use of *professor* when referring to our case study teacher. We want to make clear when we are referring to our teacher who served as our research participant and whose practice is at the heart of this text.

The case study research we conducted permits a more intimate glimpse of what is actually happening from the teacher's preparation for class to the moments of mutual excitement and discovery during class interactions, as well as the first-person descriptions shared by the professor and his students. We believe our work allows teachers to make both personal and professional connections that will enhance teaching and learning.

Using the phenomenological research methodology developed at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017), this book provides an opportunity for readers to walk in the shoes of our case study professor and his graduate students. But we also include teachers and students' first-person descriptions in a variety of higher education settings that demonstrate the feasibility

of our approach in other contexts.

We do not recommend a set of techniques or activities. Instead, we share a phenomenological *approach* that can inform the unique connoisseur-ship of good teachers—the sensitivity to subtle variations of the lifeworld of the classroom—informed by a *phenomenological attitude* (Churchill, 2012; Dirkx, 1998; Finlay, 2008). We include in-depth examples of the approach from the case study (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) but also descriptions of our approach and its use in community college and university settings across numerous fields of study (Chapter 8). We also compare and contrast our findings and framework to that of more mainstream research and other pedagogical approaches (Chapter 9).

Our Case Study

We began our case study because of consistent anecdotal reports that students of a certain graduate seminar were telling other people, "take this course, it will change your life." Throughout the 30 years it was taught, a sizeable number of students and also faculty members participated in the course more than once. Although the professor taught graduate courses focused on learning theory, he claimed little interest in any of the related pedagogical research that might inform his teaching. Clearly, something special was happening in this course—unaffected as it was by mainstream pedagogy—that led to students' reports of transformative learning.

Our curiosity developed into a study of the lived experience of this professor and his students in the graduate seminar—as it occurred—week by week. Our case study was *empirical*—in the sense of using data based on first-hand experience. It was *descriptive*—in that for most of our data, participants were asked to describe their experience in careful detail, while with our analysis of transcribed classroom episodes, we provide evidence of the way in which teaching and learning occurred during class sessions. It was *personal*—in that our findings are presented in the first-person language of participants before we discuss our interpretation of them in more abstract language. Finally, it was *comprehensive*—in that we studied the course in its entirety (over two sections of the course in subsequent years) and focused on the experiences of the professor, his students, and third-person observations.

The case study had five goals:

1. Describe the lived experience of a professor and his students in a semester-long, graduate level seminar derived from transcribed interviews and excerpts of class sessions.
2. Derive implications from findings that illuminate a framework of teaching principles.
3. Explore the potential contributions of existential phenomenology to the science and art of teaching and learning.

4. Compare and contrast this approach to teaching and learning with evidence-based practices and theory regarding other approaches to higher education pedagogy.

5. Determine the applicability of this approach in other higher education teaching/learning settings by exploring the experiences of other teachers and learners in community college and university settings at undergraduate and graduate levels and in diverse programs of study.

With these goals in mind, we undertook a phenomenological study combined with case study methods. Our hermeneutic phenomenological approach is built on years of development at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989; Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2006; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; Sohn et al., 2017; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). There are many approaches to phenomenological research discussed in the literature (see Finlay, 2012 for an overview). Nevertheless, Natanson (1973) described features of phenomenological research that apply to all or most of these approaches:

> one learned what phenomenology is step by step, through reading, discussion, and reflection.... What is needed is rather simple: to learn what is meant by the natural attitude, to practice *epoché*, to attempt descriptions of presentations without prejudicing the results by taking for granted the history, causality, intersubjectivity, and value we ordinarily associate with our experience, and to examine with absolute care the fabric of the world of daily life so that we may grasp its source and its direction....
>
> (p. 8)

The UTK approach stands out from others most clearly in three ways. First, research participants are given freedom to describe what stood out to them as meaningful in their experience. At UTK we ask one open-ended question and only include additional questions for clarification as the interview proceeds. Second, a significant amount of analysis is conducted through dialogue in our Transdisciplinary Phenomenology Research Group (TPRG) that provides multiple perspectives on the transcribed texts. Third, thematic findings are typically reported in the first-person words of participants—that represent a common essence of the experience shared by all participants in each study—choosing words and phrases where possible that are poetic in nature and/or share meaningful metaphors (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Over two semesters, our research team collected data. Reports on various aspects of the emerging research are available in greater detail elsewhere (the professor's experience of preparing for class [Franklin, 2013], student experiences of other students [Sohn, 2016], and students' experiences of the course overall [Sohn et al., 2016]). The most relevant findings from these studies are included in the chapters of this text along with related studies conducted by various members of the TPRG over the past 25 years.

The Course and Its Professor

The seminar was titled *Existential Phenomenological Psychology*. The professor designed the course for upper level doctoral students who came from psychology and philosophy as well as applied fields such as business, counseling, education, nursing, and sports psychology; the course was also taken by master's degree students and an occasional undergraduate. The content focused on the philosophy of existential phenomenology from a psychological perspective, primarily the ideas of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Essentially, the professor guided seminar discussions by focusing student attention on descriptions of their own or others' lived experience as it related to course readings and also by engaging students in practicing phenomenological research during class.

The professor assigned readings to be completed prior to each class session. Whole books or excerpts included numerous authors, such as Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945/1962), Ihde (*Experimental Phenomenology*, 1986), Berger and Luckmann (*The Social Construction of Reality*, 1967), and Tuan (*Space and Place*, 1977). The professor told students that their only obligation for the course was to read: there would be no graded assignments. Few students had background in philosophy; most found the readings, particularly those of Merleau-Ponty, initially difficult to understand.

We describe the professor's teaching in much greater detail in Chapter 4 and provide only a brief overview here. Rather than beginning with lectures that explained ideas from readings, he typically invited students into a dialogue by asking what stood out to them from the texts. He encouraged students to "say more" about the meaning of passages and only afterwards shared his own deeper or alternative understanding. The professor not only led but also followed students into deep reflection on descriptions of personal experience as it related to the subject matter. In addition, he led them toward the key concepts he wanted them to learn by preparing stories, activities, and questions that he then used to launch them into the world of those ideas.

The professor strived in every class to engage students in awareness of being-in-the-world, being in a living experience in the classroom. He did this often through playfulness, by frequently making fun of himself, "This is getting worser and worser!" (as he discussed a complicated concept) or by adding levity and/or drama to student stories.

Attendance and class participation were high. Field notes from class sessions often included documentation of engagement such as laughter, note taking, or silent pauses after dialogue or *mini-lectures* (typically 2- to 15-minute explanations of abstract knowledge). Audio recordings captured the energy and deep reflection participants displayed in their tones of voice. Student reflections immediately after each class revealed what stood out to them in each session. From personal insights to professional applications, profound thoughtfulness to practical implementation, these

data were part of the overall data collection scheme, as detailed below.

Research Questions and Data Collection

For the case study, the research team members worked together to develop the research questions, participant prompts, and other data collection procedures suited to the case study (see the Foreword for a discussion of author positionality). Our goal throughout was to create prompts that would allow participants to comment on whatever it was within their experience of the course that stood out. Table 1.1 lists specific research questions and our procedures for collection of data.

Data Analysis

The UTK data analysis methods are enriched by the dialogical, hermeneutic process used by the TPRG wherein transcripts of data are read aloud. Researchers stop periodically to share interpretations: they make connections to empirical studies, philosophical scholarship, literature, or even a recent radio or television program and also to personal experiences. They seek to continually keep in mind the context of their interpretations through bracketing—they consider the various contexts of the study, the participants, the specific words and phrases they use, and why or why not certain elements of a transcript may stand out to members of the TPRG. The themes, like specific interpretations, attempt to keep a sense of the whole. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and Gadamer's (1960/2013) focus on the *hermeneutic circle*, we interpreted data to find not only what participants considered *figural* but the often-implicit *ground* from which the figure stands out (see Sohn et al., 2017, for greater detail).

Table 1.1 Case Study Research Questions and Data Collection

Research Questions	Data Collection
What was the experience of the professor as he prepared for and reflected on his teaching?	Audio recordings of planning sessions before each class session and immediately after each session
What processes did the professor use during class sessions?	Audio recordings of class sessions. Selection of 3-5 episodes in each session that stood out as particularly meaningful. A 2-hour audio recorded phenomenological interview of his experience
What were the students' experiences of each class session?	Written reflections prepared by students at the conclusion of each class session to include what stood out to them as particularly meaningful

What were the experiences of students of the course as a whole?	Audio recordings of individual student interviews and two focus group interviews at the conclusion of the course
What were students' experiences of other students?	Gathering of all student data in which students focused on their experience of other students

For the case study, the research team reached consensus on themes that represented a given experience across participants. We confirmed that each theme related to other themes and the context in which they were experienced. We used the words of the participants where possible to represent each theme. For example, in one of our studies of black students on a predominately white university campus (Davis et al., 2004), we could have labeled one theme using a jargon construct, "marginalized." But we wanted to help readers get inside the meaning of marginalization to these students. Hence, we selected a metaphor stated by one participant that best represented the meaning for all student participants: "A fly in the buttermilk."

To increase the trustworthiness of our research, again we submitted our findings to the scrutiny of the TPRG. This process enabled us to revise our findings until they provided the best possible representation of the data from the case study. In this manner the rigor and coherence of our findings were enhanced. In this book we summarize the studies that inform our implications and contribute to a phenomenological approach for teaching and learning.

The research we describe, along with application of philosophical concepts from existential phenomenology, are the bases of our approach for teaching and learning. From the findings and the specific philosophical ideas we detail below, we support our phenomenological framework. In the next section, we provide an overview of what stands out to us from the field of existential phenomenology and its relevance in teaching and learning.

Our Perspective on Existential Phenomenology

[T]he world is what [I] perceive. To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth…. The world is not what I think, but what I live through.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, pp. xvi–xvii)

In this book, we focus on the teacher and student experience in the life-world of the classroom as informed by the field of existential phenomenology (for a detailed history, see Bakewell, 2016; Moran, 2000; Sokolowski, 2000). Note that unless otherwise indicated, when we say "phenomenology," we mean existential phenomenology in regard to our understanding of Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962)

perspective.

Most especially, we draw our inspiration from the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (e.g., 1945/1962). But we include the explanations of others (often writing about Merleau-Ponty's views as well as additional phenomenologist philosophers) when we find their statements helpful in relation to teaching and learning in higher education (see Table 1.2 for a brief overview of each of our key concepts).

What draws us to existential phenomenology is its emphasis on human experience:

> [An existential phenomenologist] does not view experience (or consciousness in more technical terms) as a consequence of some internal set of events such as mind or brain but as a relationship between people and their world, whether the world at that moment consists of other people, nature, time, one's own body, personal or philosophical ideas or whatever. What is sought by both existentialism and phenomenology is a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity. For existential phenomenology, the world is to be lived and described, not explained.
>
> (Pollio et al., 1997, pp. 4–5)

Many scholars have written extensively about implications of existential phenomenology for education (e.g., Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012; van Manen, 2017), but their focus has primarily been on phenomenology's relevance for teachers of children and youth. There are many phenomenological researchers that apply phenomenology to their scholarship on teaching in higher education (e.g., Adams & van Manen, 2017; Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1984; Halling, 2012; Hultgren, 1987, 1995;

Table 1.2 Authors' Perspectives Regarding Phenomenological Concepts That Inform Our Teaching Approach

Concept	Authors' Perspective
Perception	The subjective means by which we become aware of the world, forever bound by what stands out to us within a given context. By its nature, perception necessarily narrows our perspectives in ways we are often unaware. "What we see is always a function of 'how' we are looking" (Churchill, 2006, p. 89).
Intentionality	A quality of the mindthatdr ind that drives us in a certain manner, i unaware. in ways we are oftei Bakewell (2016) discusses constant relationship of our intentionality as the the minds with "our thoughts are invariably *of or about* world, in which something" embracing "the whirl of our minds as nded (p. 44); they seize their inter phenomena one after the other and the floor… ." (p. whisk them around (1999), 46). According to Searle ty involves subjective states intentionalityi "beliefs and including, , intentions and perceptions, as well as rs desires, loves and hates, fear and hopes" (p. 85).

Lifeworld	The lived experience of a human-being-in-the world, co-constituting the world as subjective meaning emerges from situated context. "It is a social, historical, and cultural world [that] includes individual, social, perceptual, and practical experiences" (from Alan Parson's course notes on *Lebenswelt*, 2016).
Intertwined influences on our perception, intentionality, and lifeworld of which we are often unaware:	
Embodiment	The body as a lived, experiential structure and as the context of cognitive mechanisms. Our lived experience always includes embodied aspects of development, cognition, physical sensations, and emotions of which we may or may not be aware.
Sociocultural embeddedness	Existence within a particular sociocultural milieu. Our personal, professional, familial, linguistic, and societal experiences create a worldview, a lens that necessarily limits what and how we see the world.
Intersubjectivity	The connection of humans to each other in some form of mutuality that can provide a sense of community or alienation, but that by our nature remains subjective. With an *egalitarian stance*, a teacher joins students as another learner exploring course content and personal experiences, where the teacher's and students' paths "intersect and engage each other like gears" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. xx).
Ambiguity	The fundamental indeterminacy of experience that can provide a sense of awe and mystery about course content as well as engender creativity. When ignored, it can lead to an *utilitarian attitude* that prioritizes specific practical applications of knowledge and skills related to content with little thought to their phenomenological meaning that transcends the classroom.

Selvi, 2008), but this body of work focuses almost exclusively on the teaching of the methodology and/or philosophy of phenomenology rather than the application of the phenomenological method to a broader framework for teaching and learning, which is our intent (see Chapters 8 and 9).

Our knowledge of the world comes primarily through our first-person experience of it, through our perceptions and the *intentionality* through which our subjective states connect us with the world. For Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) intentionality is part of "an ever-flowing energy, a *network of relations*" (p. xx) between a person and the world—driven by "a psychological and historical structure ... a way of existing, or a

style" (p. 455).

As humans, we experience and learn about the world through perception and intentionality. "The world is not what I think, but what I live through" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, pp. xvi–xvii). But perception and intentionality are subjective; thanks to academia's rationalist, objectivist focus, we are typically unaware of their influence. As Hass (2008) states, perception "opens up in perspective [figures within some ground] … overflowing with half-hidden things that overlap, hide, and allude to other things" (p. 58).

If as teachers we understand the meaning and importance of the life-world, we can nurture a feeling or approach in ourselves and our students that opens the lifeworld of the classroom for examination. For it is with this approach, including the phenomenological attitude, that we can go to the heart of teaching and learning and *realize* the objective world of course content in all its subjectivity.

The Phenomenological Attitude

Our understanding of the phenomenological attitude falls in with views of the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. Finlay (2008) describes the phenomenological attitude as a dance "engaging a certain sense of wonder and openness to the world while, at the same time, reflexively restraining pre-understandings" (p. 2). In this manner, people can "[open] themselves to being moved by the Other, where evolving understandings are managed in a relational context" (p. 3). For humans connect with the world through our senses, filtered through the subjective lenses of our attitudes, values, and beliefs that have evolved through individual experience. To live with this attitude, it is necessary that we acknowledge and constantly work to be aware of our subjectivity. Through the intersubjectivity inherent in a relational context, shared feelings or meanings lead to an increased sense of empathy, a *listening to be influenced*.

A relational stance and cultivation of empathy are common elements in descriptions of the phenomenological attitude. Churchill (2012), for example, described his provision of learning experiences for "cultivating an empathic presence to the world" (p. 3). He talked about his students "becoming enthralled to discover that they can tap into their own experience to open themselves to new worlds" (p. 3). Likewise, Dirkx (1998) discusses how a phenomenological attitude creates space for transformational learning experiences as meaning-making processes instrumental in fostering "a democratic vision of society and self-actualization of individuals" (p. 9).

A phenomenological attitude extends beyond relations with other people, however. Henriksson (2012) recalled being asked by a student if she felt like she was a better person, now that she has found phenomenology. Henriksson (2012) responded, "if better means more thoughtful, more willing to question the taken-for-granted, more open to others' experiences, then yes, phenomenology makes us better persons and probably also better teachers" (p. 122). She stated that phenomenology

has the "the potential to create a sense of wonder, openness, change, and readiness to reflect on pedagogical matters" (p. 123). The findings we share in this book related to student experiences support those reported by other researchers and illustrate how students open to a phenomenological attitude when in learning environments that honor the lifeworld of the classroom.

Our particular existential phenomenological approach to teaching and learning in higher education rests on several intertwined aspects that stood out to us from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. We believe they can help teachers deepen their understanding of what influences perception and intentionality: *embodiment*, *sociocultural embeddedness, ambiguity, intersubjectivity*. For these four influences, always in play in the lifeworld of the classroom and of each individual student and teacher, can lead to exploration of assumptions and intuitive thoughts that might otherwise go unnoticed and interfere with learning, and with teaching. We discuss these concepts next.

Intertwined Influences of Perception

At first glance, an emphasis on perception seems rather obvious and of limited value to teaching and learning—as perception is a naturally occurring act. But Merleau-Ponty (1948/2004) describes our apparent familiarity with the world as "a delusion" and commented, "the world of perception is, to a great extent, unknown territory as long as we remain in the … utilitarian attitude" (p. 39).

In the current culture of higher education, the teacher's role is often utilitarian in the negative sense Merleau-Ponty describes (see Chapter 7 for a discussion). Many higher education "instructors" focus almost exclusively on training students, on transmitting the knowledge and skills of course content. Indeed, the job of the college instructor is to impart a given world of abstract knowledge, of explanation and analysis of subject matter—which may engage students in deep reflection, or merely provide an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to repeat back in some manner the information instructors transmit. Perception of each student's human experience seems a distraction. But Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) says direct personal perception is of *primary* importance in developing knowledge:

> All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second order expression.
>
> (p. viii)

Students may not believe, think, or *realize* (make real for themselves) the ideas

their teachers want them most to learn—at least not in the manner that can expand and possibly transform their lives. But because abstract knowledge is built upon students' "basic experience of the world," our framework hinges upon perception.

Student perceptions, whether or not teachers are aware of them, can enhance or inhibit their ability to understand course content. For perception involves a given perspective, and some perspectives hide alternative views. But if teachers exclusively hold a utilitarian perspective, even when students are eager to learn, their goal may be to "cover" the content. They may believe they should not "waste" time helping students consider alternative perspectives related to course content, or helping students experience the inevitable ambiguity of new perceptions in a constructive way. Unfortunately, rather than address these issues, most of the literature on "best practices" takes a top-down stance on "correcting misconceptions," implying student perceptions and experiences are wrong. Further, recommendations for higher education increasingly call for a utilitarian attitude rather than the broader goal of higher education (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Cangemi, 2001; see also Chapter 7).

As we detail in other chapters, with our approach we seek to harness perception in such a way that students are *launched into the world* of the course subject matter. Our case study helped us understand how describing experiences relevant to course content prior to explaining abstract concepts allowed the case study professor and his students to explore their perceptions and meaning at a deeper level (see Box 1.3). Assumptions were questioned, alternative ideas discussed, and realizations frequently took place. We address the value of description in various chapters through our case study and related research findings.

Box 1.3 Reflection, *Howard Pollio*

Instead of beginning with an explanation of the meaning of space and place in the lived experience of humans, I brought five landscape paintings to class and asked several students to describe what stood out for them and then encouraged all students to pay attention to the similarities and differences among these descriptions. Only then did I connect these descriptions to the assigned reading of Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977) and the connections of Tuan's ideas to those of Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty's ideas about four aspects of perception contributed greatly to our development of an existential phenomenological approach. As mentioned above, they include *sociocultural embeddedness*, *embodiment*, *intersubjectivity*, and *ambiguity*. Each presents a facet, like those of a diamond, that brings out heretofore hidden depths and enhances illumination of the human experience of being-in-the-world. In this section we define these concepts and provide a brief overview of their relation to the lifeworld of the classroom. We develop them further in later chapters.

Sociocultural Embeddedness

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) discusses the role of sociocultural development as a key context through which we learn to interpret the world. Sociocultural embeddedness refers to this context, which includes language, culture, and history. Although the particular term "sociocultural embeddedness" is not one Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) uses, he writes extensively about the ways sociocultural development in childhood determines how we interpret the world. Bakewell (2016) discusses his remarkable insight:

> Of course, we have to learn this skill of interpreting and anticipating the world, and this happens in early childhood.... We fall for optical illusions because we once learned to see the world in terms of shapes, objects, and things relevant to our own interests.... We rarely stop to think that [the thing or thought] is partly constituted by our way of paying attention or reaching out to things.

(pp. 231–232)

In particular, Bakewell (2016) discusses the social/cultural/historical influences from past experience. But these influences do not end with early childhood. If we become experts in some field of study, we co-create our perception of it with tacit and intuitive knowledge beyond its decontextualized subject matter. No teacher can fully step outside their own pre-academic development, their intuition (see Box 1.4), nor the assumptions and structures of their field of inquiry; neither can students that are confronted with novel information. Being aware of our own and students' sociocultural embeddedness can assist us in achieving our goals.

Box 1.4 Reflection, *Neil Greenberg*

As an ethologist by training with a research career in academia, I teach graduate and undergraduate biology courses that include content far removed from ethology. Nevertheless, my lectures and responses to student inquiry are always connected in a subtle if not overt manner to my understanding of this discipline of biology by first describing behaviors (actions) of organisms, followed by looking for patterns of relationships and connections and only then inferring causation. The assumptions, questions, and ways of inquiry of ethology infuse all my work.

Sociocultural embeddedness contributes to the lifeworld of the classroom in deeper ways as well (see Box 1.5). The term "unconscious/implicit bias" recently became a popular term, appearing frequently in the media (e.g., Spinney, 2014) and popular books (e.g., Kahneman, 2011) reviewing extensive research in this area. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ideas about sociocultural embeddedness are manifest and

confirmed in social psychology research (e.g., Haidt, 2001; Kahneman, 2011). Humans have prejudices and misconceptions. We cannot avoid it. As teachers, we view our students through unconscious bias, through stereotypes of race, class, gender, and what we think they are like as more or less responsible learners. As Mackh (2018) states, "We must first recognize our own biases, presumptions, and the impact of culture in our own lives so that we can genuinely, respectfully, humbly do the most good for the people whose lives we hope to improve" (p. 199). Our students, too, are embedded in a sociocultural milieu, and they enter our classrooms with their own perspectives they developed through experiences in their families, earlier schooling, and the communities in which they live. These influences affect how they approach the teacher and the course content.

Box 1.5 Reflection, *Brian Sohn*

As I teach courses regarding the professional obligation of teacher candidates to do their part to dismantle systemic racism and work for social justice, I encounter resistance. There have been times when this resistance comes across as bigoted. When I hear phrases such as "I'm not racist, I have friends that are black," "Some of the gay kids just want attention," and other such banalities, it is difficult to maintain an open relational stance. At times I do so and find my negative assumptions to be correct, but at other times I learn from my students in unexpected ways. In one instance, a student responded negatively to a video in which black youth are described by a school principal as "victims." After dialogue with the student, I found, rather than latent racism, this student had suffered abuse from her domestic partner: in facing him in court, she was referred to repeatedly as a victim and had come to hate the term. She preferred survivor. Without an openness to student perspectives, I would have made the grave error of thinking I knew when I was influenced by my own bias. As my ignorance was alleviated, my understanding of the student grew and as a result I was better able to serve her learning needs.

As we describe in later chapters, our approach focuses on sociocultural embeddedness in order to broaden our own and our students' awareness of their social, historical, and cultural situations. We work to reveal underlying assumptions and use lived experience to more deeply reach our students.

Embodiment

Perhaps Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) most notable contribution to philosophy was his elucidation of embodiment and its clear refutation of the Cartesian dualism of

mind and body. He stresses that "thinking is never devoid of context; it is always shaped by my history, language, interpersonal influences, and my *bodily attunement* [emphasis added] toward a meaningful and structured world or environment" (p. x). His ideas are especially important to consider in the classroom due to their implications for expression, language, and meaning (Adams, 2014; Hass, 2008):

> My body is the seat or rather the very actuality of the phenomenon of expression.... My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven. [So] my body is ... that strange object which uses its own parts as a general system of symbols for the world, and through which we can consequently "be at home" in that world, "understand" it and find significance in it.

<div align="right">(Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 235)</div>

All lived experience, even thinking, is embodied. Everything we as humans do—and are—involves our physical body and our senses, including our interoceptive and proprioceptive interaction with cognitive processes. Our engagement with the internal as well as the external world is fundamental to who we are as human-beings-in-the-world. Our feelings, imaginings, intuition, and many psychological and environmental influences are a part of us and, of course, influence teaching and learning (see Box 1.6).

Box 1.6 Reflection, *Kathy Greenberg*

I recall a time as a student when embodiment dramatically affected my learning. My professor was well known in his field and was teaching an introductory graduate course on a particular theory of learning. I was excited to be studying under an esteemed researcher. But I felt my body tense as the teacher began to speak rapidly about basic tenets of the theory. I sensed defensiveness in his demeanor which I took to mean the class was not a safe environment in which students could openly question any of the tenets. Later I learned the professor was coping with recent criticism of this once highly esteemed theory. Although I was able to do well on tests, I found I could not creatively engage with the content—I could not *mess about* (Hawkins, 1974) with the implications for teaching that the theory was supposed to make obvious.

In the lifeworld of the classroom, bodies and embodiment are often ignored, but always influential. When teachers and students are aware of emotions and other sensations, they become more mindful of the present moment. When the classroom is open to humor, to acceptance of feelings ranging from excitement to frustration or confusion, the classroom becomes more "real." With our approach we appreciate, rather than ignore, the key role the body plays in teaching and learning. For embodiment is not simply some kind of affect or motivation. It is more. For it is the

seat and site of our lived experience. In later chapters we discuss the role of embodiment in the lifeworld of the classroom and ways teachers can create a safe atmosphere in which it is acceptable for all participants to share what they experience in its wholeness (see also Chapter 2 for a discussion of embodiment from a scientific perspective).

Intersubjectivity

While there are many definitions of intersubjectivity within various disciplines, the term generally refers to agreement—mutual understanding—between individuals that leads to shared feelings or meanings. Intersubjectivity is related to empathy, understanding another individual's feelings from their point of view. But discussions of empathy are often limited to the realm of the cognitive. Intersubjectivity includes as integral the embodied individuals who share a world together with some degree of safety and/or conflict and sometimes with the synergy of something created between us. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) describes the ways in which reflection ultimately reveals not only a self, but a self that is in a world in which other selves exist: "The world is an indivisible unity of value shared" by all those with consciousness (p. xi). And in the lifeworld of the classroom, this shared indivisible world, this basis for intersubjectivity, can be seen most clearly in language. Hass (2008) states,

> In language, in dialogue, self and other communicate, that is, they "come together in one": conversation sweeps us into a common experience in which "subject" and "object" have no place, in which we are reciprocally drawn out of ourselves and our former thoughts toward the other.

(p. 110)

Regarding others, Merleau-Ponty took a decidedly egalitarian stance. He viewed other people as "fellow travelers in life's journey" (Thomas, 2005, p. 71) and wrote, "my own and other people's [paths] intersect and engage each other like gears" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. xx). As humans, we are very good at categorizing and comparing ourselves to others but rather wary when facing the others' uniqueness, which can complicate teacher-student and student-student relationships. With our approach, we discuss ways to personalize relationships with students, so we can build trust and find the bridges to connect with each other (see Box 1.7).

Box 1.7 Reflection, *Howard Pollio*

I often share stories about how I acquired my knowledge, illustrating how I came to realize the abstract concepts of the subject matter. I present those stories in a self-deprecating manner as another learner working to expand his understanding of the world. My stories and my stance as an advanced student

> of the course content help create a sense that my students and I are all learners, we all have weaknesses, and we can all work together to pursue the challenges of learning.

Through our framework, we honor intersubjectivity by joining our students as learners in order to lead them to deeper understandings of course content (see especially Chapters 4 and 8).

Ambiguity

According to Hass (2008), Merleau-Ponty uses ambiguity "literally to denote that our experience of the world is pregnant with multiple meaning-directions … with multiple things calling for our attention" (p. 62). Ambiguity is part of the mystery of lived experience. Merleau-Ponty saw the ultimate role of the philosopher to always question assumptions and approach even "well-known" phenomena with wonder and openness. Perpetual questioning leaves the fixed accounts of objectivity open to flexibility and uncertainty and allows for a sense of excitement and discovery within everyday life.

To be sure, the particular sociocultural backgrounds and bodies of teachers and students leave open the potential for chaotic and infinitely differentiated interpretations of course content. But far from suggesting students will not learn what we teach, we believe implications of Merleau-Ponty's ideas tell us that students will have their own perspectives, and while these may cohere through our guidance, we can create opportunities to navigate multiple meanings within the classroom, assured that no phenomenon is ever known in a complete way.

Ambiguity may seem counter to the typical enterprise of teaching and learning. Most students, perhaps due to their past learning experiences in the school setting, want to attain a fixed set of knowledge from their teachers. "Just give me the answer," a student may say. But from science to the humanities, ambiguity can be linked to important cautions in scholarship, such as tentativeness, interpretation, and appropriation when considering research results. Failure to realize the ubiquity of ambiguity is a barrier to deep learning (see chapter 5). From the author of a textbook, to a teacher lecturing, to a student learning, course content may be seen as objective and rigid. Students become distracted from sensing the mystery in our experience of learning something; they may remain unaware of their co-constitution of it.

Within our approach, the ambiguity that exists in all fields of study is not only acknowledged but used to develop powerful learning. We value the mystery and curiosity that accompanies ambiguity and share more about its power in later chapters. These four influences on perception, crucial to our approach to teaching and learning, are not isolated from each other. Ambiguity is intertwined with embodiment, sociocultural embeddedness, and intersubjectivity. For perception

underlies the mind's intentionality.

Intentionality

At the heart of teaching and learning—as with all human experience—lies an ever-flowing energy, a *network of relations* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. xx) between a person and the world. Most philosophers call this situated perspective *intentionality*, adopted by Husserl to address the mind's disposition to be *about* something. Although much controversy exists among philosophers over the particularities of intentionality, Searle (1999) describes intentionality in a manner that is helpful in relation to our focus on teaching and learning:

> The primary evolutionary role of the mind is to relate us in certain ways to the environment, and especially to other people. My subjective states relate me to the rest of the world, and the general name of that relationship is "intentionality." These subjective states include beliefs and desires, intentions and perceptions, as well as loves and hates, fears and hopes. "Intentionality," to repeat, is the general term for all the various forms by which the mind can be directed at, or be about, or of, objects and states of affairs in the world.
>
> (p. 85)

By its very nature, intentionality is always a first-person perspective; "What we see is always a function of 'how' we are looking" (Churchill, 2006, p. 89). For

> [w]e learn and relearn who we are on the basis of our encounters with objects, ideas, and people—in short, with every different kind of "otherness".... What we are aware of in a situation reveals something important about who we are.
>
> (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 8)

Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), the human experience involves a structure of intentionality, and "All of my actions and thoughts are related to this structure" (p. 455). And first-person descriptions are the way to understand the structure, to reveal it. For we do not deliberately control our intentionality. Based on the intertwined aspects of perception, we may be completely unaware of its structure.

Merleau-Ponty makes the following connections between intentionality and Gestalt psychology: figure-ground relationships (critical in Gestalt psychology) provide a window into intentionality by revealing what stands out in a lived experience and what recedes to the background. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) describes the all-encompassing role of intentionality and its subjective states:

> The fact remains that I am free, not in spite of, or on the hither side of, these motivations, but by means of them. For this significant life, this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary, is my means of entering into communication with it. It is by being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am

at present that I have a chance of moving forward; it is by living my time that I am able to understand other times, by plunging into the present and the world, by taking on deliberately what I am fortuitously, by willing what I will and doing what I do, that I can go further.

<div align="right">(pp. 455–456)</div>

Hence, in the lifeworld of the classroom, all participants—teacher and students—have their own, personal network of relations with other participants, the physical environment, and course content. Each participant's intentionality in turn becomes a part of the lived experience of the other participants. What participants are aware of and how they are aware of it reveal what is important to them. Intentionality connects a multitude of processes with each other and the world. It influences their demeanor, how participants connect or disconnect with others, and their perceptions of teaching and learning as they live the moments of the class. Intentionality is—and figure and ground are—fundamental to human experience and led us to Merleau-Ponty's work on the nature of perception. It is our intent that other chapters in this book will make these concepts come alive.

In summary, our approach seeks to go to the phenomenological heart of teaching and learning in higher education. We believe an understanding of the intertwined influences on perception of sociocultural embeddedness, embodiment, intersubjectivity, and ambiguity can help teachers better understand the phenomenological attitude, including related intentionality. Teachers who are open to the meaning of the lifeworld of the classroom will display a much more egalitarian than authoritarian stance as they embrace intersubjectivity in their relationship with students and toward course content. Although usually a more knowledgeable other, this kind of teacher invites students to share-or points out in class-alternative views and the ambiguity natural to our exploration of any objective knowledge. This kind of teacher joins students in exploring the wonder of course content, rather than maintaining a strict focus on the "facts." Further, teachers with a phenomenological attitude can better balance the utilitarian demands of helping students master knowledge and skills needed in some future career with the importance of exploring personal experience in relation to course content. In this manner, such teachers help students find deep meaning at the heart of learning.

Our intent is to connect philosophy, research, and implications for practice. The purpose of each chapter is to help readers follow us through these lines of thinking so that our existential phenomenological approach becomes clear and useful to higher education teachers.

Organization of This Text

The goal of our organization is to help the reader live through the case study course from planning, to teaching and learning, to the outcomes of learning and

In Conclusion

> If no work is ever absolutely completed and done with, still each creation changes, alters, enlightens, deepens, confirms, exalts, re-creates or creates in advance all the others ... [Creations] have almost all their life before them.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 190)

The years our research team has spent on this project have provided each of us with deep insight, but we do not feel "it is absolutely completed." We remain open to the ambiguity we find in the exploration of the life-world of the classroom and the phenomenological heart of teaching and learning. We are in awe of the experience of teaching and of learning. We acknowledge that most authorities in higher education pedagogy do not recognize the need for, or perhaps have no understanding of, the phenomenological attitude. For it is a need long ignored by mainstream views of pedagogy. Owen-Smith (2018) discusses the "legacy of loss" (p. 2) in modern education when this kind of learning experience is ignored. She speaks of the resistance felt by those in her field of contemplative education and also, as she writes, by those involved with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). And we believe all of us focused on existential phenomenology share this view:

> We are no longer given time and space for imagination, curiosity, and creativity and for the unfolding of what we have always had. The stillness and quiet necessary for thought development and deep intellectual inquiry become nonproductive, a wasting of time, and a squandering of resources.... we lose our ability to attend mindfully and to reflect....
>
> (Owen-Smith, 2018, p. 2)

Our students join us in the awe and wonder of making time for contemplation, for describing personal experience in relation to abstract knowledge, for exploring the influences of our sociocultural embeddedness, embodiment, intersubjectivity, and ambiguity on our perceptions and intentionality.

We also take a historical view, in line with Sherman (2014) as he wrote in his text *Refocusing the Self in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Perspective*:

> As we move into the second decade of the twenty-first century, when higher education is under attack from many directions, we need to consider whether the philosophies which have served the academy so far (viz., rationalism, neo-humanism, idealism, pragmatism) are still adequate. We need to consider also whether these philosophies hold the potential to truly unify higher education and render students' experiences meaningful and purposeful.... The philosophical developments of phenomenology and post-structuralism which occurred subsequent to these traditionally drawn-upon philosophical schools, do more accurately mirror and account for the conditions of our time.
>
> (p. 70)

We need to heed the call of others who question the push from society to turn higher

education towards goals specifically focused on preparation for the workforce—instead of the liberal education of students. In the foreword to Palmer and Zajonc's (2010) *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, Nepo wrote:

> What you have before you is a thoughtful and grounded invitation to live into the heart of higher education and to deepen our understanding and practice of transformative learning. The magnitude of the issues confronting the world requires whole people with whole minds and hearts to lead us into tomorrow. And that, in turn, requires us to renew the human purpose and meaning at the heart of higher education.
>
> (p. ix)

We invite you the reader to join us in a creation of the phenomenological heart of teaching and learning in higher education.

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