Chapter 8
Restoring Lifeworlds Through Phenomenological Writing, Reflection and Collaboration

Abstract: Doctoral students from the University of the Virgin Islands participated in the “From Strangers to Collaborators” research project, using phenomenological protocol writing. Triggering a unique approach, they were instructed to identify and develop a “most poignant experience” to guide their meditation. A sampling of five writings is presented. Key elements highlighted in the writing include how strangers may become collaborators, the Qualities of Transformative Phenomenologists, Deathworld themes emerging from the protocols, and indications of personal transformation that occurred as a direct result of engaging in phenomenological writing.

Keywords: Transformative Phenomenology, Deathworlds, protocols

Introduction

Doctoral students from three universities located in the United States, Poland, and the Virgin Islands came together in virtual environments in an encounter with Transformative Phenomenology.¹ They were given several resources to use to acquaint themselves with the fundamentals and processes of writing phenomenology. Central to their efforts was the course objective of writing phenomenological protocols. The first of eight protocols involved selecting a memory, a most poignant phenomenon, on which to write a rich description of lived experience.²

The purpose of choosing a poignant phenomenon over a pleasurable or aesthetic phenomenon stems from the difference in their nature. Poignancy supplies

¹ Students participated in the multi-national and multi-institutional “From Strangers to Collaborators” participatory action research project. See Chapter 1 in this volume, and Transformative Phenomenology: Changing ourselves, lifeworlds, and professional practice (Rehorick/Bentz 2008).
² The protocol sequence was developed by Valerie Bentz while teaching phenomenology to doctoral students at Fielding Graduate University. See Expressions of phenomenological research: Consciousness and lifeworld studies (Rehorick/Bentz 2017).
depth and durability of conscious determinations, the judgments that surrounded the event, experience, or relationship.

The reasoning behind this choice is not unlike Robert Kegan’s (1994) direction that his Subject-Object interviewees focus on a conflict (Lahey et al. 1983). The internal structure of conflict acts as a lens resolving in finer detail one’s mental, emotional, and social distinctions. Kegan’s work was not phenomenological; rather, it delved into areas of human development using object relations, measuring and revealing which level of mental complexity interviewees had obtained and by which they made sense of their experiences.

Nevertheless, the principle tracks well from one field to another. By asking our participants to mark the beginning of their protocol writing with a poignant experience, often such a memory will reproduce a keen residual sense of sadness. Natural paths of remembrance often prompt one to search out some way to reorganize years of emotional and social fallout from a most poignant experience, a reexamination that may eventually transmute it into something meaningful.

Mustering a poignant experience as a starting point, students were exposed to three theoretical lanes to guide them as they wrote rich descriptions, casting and re-casting their interpretations. The lanes were formed from the foundational work of Edmund Husserl (Husserl 1913/1931), the father of phenomenology, Alfred Schütz (Schütz/Luckmann 1973/1989), theoretician of the real-world implementation of structures of the Lifeworld, and Kenneth Burke’s Dramatist Pentad (Burke 1945).

Our question in this chapter is, at what level can it be claimed that writing phenomenology, that is, following assiduously the steps of the phenomenological protocols, leads to personal transformation? Judging from samples below taken from doctoral students in the Virgin Islands transformation, as a thorough and dramatic change, begins almost immediately. Figure 1 below gives a sense of the work required to accomplish phenomenological writing.

It is difficult for newcomers to phenomenological writing to imagine that it is little more than another in a string of essay assignments, as in, “How I Spent My Summer Vacation.” But the very first plunge into writing phenomenologically skips past the taken-for-granted approach to writing, demanding something deeper. Writers quickly realize they must come to terms with phenomenology and its nomenclature. This means spending considerable time gaining a solid understanding of what at first appears to be words bearing obvious meanings. Words like “Lifeworld” sound almost poetic. But phenomenology has a distinct definition of what it is and how to use it correctly. A common word like “bracket” appears to require no further explication. But the effort it takes to grasp its use in phenomenology is as challenging as doing it. Doing it means setting aside preconceptions (which first requires knowing what
Figure 1: Techniques for the Exploration of Poignant Phenomenon through Writing Phenomenology. Copyright (2019) by Valerie Bentz and James Marlatt, Reproduced with Permission, Original Artwork.
one’s preconceptions are), re-starting one’s perception using a fresh approach, accepting people, things, states of affairs on their own terms, while vigilantly guarding against any arbitrary external infusions of meaning attempting to sneak unnoticed into the picture. Newcomers to phenomenological writing typically take halting steps in their first encounter. With this in mind, let’s take a sampling of student protocol writing.

Panic

One student described a panic attack while traveling with a friend. It took place in an airport, a place buzzing with sounds, movement, people, and bright lights. She reports:

My recollection of that day was nothing but a lived experience where I was moving back and forth between two different worlds. It was as if I were physically present yet physically absent. I was . . . struggling to understand, struggling to make sense of what was happening to me. . . . It seemed to me as if I was suffering from a stroke or a blackout. I felt disconnected from the physical self and the environment. . . . I was worried about what or how my friend or others would react, [questioning] if ever I was going to fully grasp and express well what was going on. Although I did not sense any pain in my body, it was terrifying. . . . I was disconnected from the human body. It is as if I had an out-of-body experience. I could see me going through the ordeal, but not being aware of how to intervene in the flesh. This was terrifying for me. (protocol, 2019)

This poignant experience etched itself deeply in her psyche. By following steps of the protocol writing, she attempts to understand and describe the experience just as it happened but keeps well away from scientific accounts. Medical science has much to say about the physical, emotional, and psychological experience of panic. Resisting the temptation to borrow descriptions from medicine, she resolutely focuses her protocol exercise on her first-person lived experience of the phenomenon. Her description captures the rapid descent from a normal Lifeworld into a Deathworld, a state of mind and body where all order taken for granted seems obliterated.

At the end of her recounting of the sudden onset of panic and the years that followed the episode, she is able to round out the experience with some careful reflections. “My phenomena of panic and disconnect not only manifested in my Lifeworld but, more importantly, it has immensely transformed me and allowed me to search for ways to better connect, strengthening bonds and relationships with friends, especially my family.”
Death of a Father

The experience of grief, bereavement, and loss is recounted by a student. Her episode occurred years earlier as she transitioned to adulthood:

The earliest memory of my phenomenon was at the age of twenty. Grief confronted me when I was a junior in college. The phone rang. I went happily to the phone to embrace a happy conversation and eager to answer the person on the other end of the call. There was silence when I answered the phone and my happy self was trying to grasp who the person was and what they were trying to convey. I learned my father was hurt. At that moment, my world seemed to have been captured into a bubble, I appeared to be floating in space watching everything pass me by. I never imagined I would hear that my father was gunned down. I immediately froze. I became speechless, numb, and lost. I began to imagine this was a dream, a nightmare. (protocol, 2019)

The trauma of the news paralyzed her and her family. As she describes, “My dad passed, leaving us in silence, grief, feeling hurt, feeling lost, angry, disbelieving; the full gamut of grief encapsulated and gripped me and my family. We all were sad and lost. We were heartbroken!”

Moving to the horizontalizing stage of the protocol writing, she reports, “We can never exhaust completely our experience of things no matter how many times we consider them. A new horizon arises each time one recedes.” A striking image and mental device she invented during horizontalization (Moustakas 1994) was the notion of shrapnel. She relates:

Shrapnel is a good image for me to grasp tightly. Shrapnel is inside me as grief. I must let the pain of it ease on its own timetable. I have been schooled in a full course of grief. The pain is a reminder of my love and my memories of my former life, but it is also a way of keeping my dad close to me in my heart as I move forward. (protocol, 2019)

As she completed the protocol writing, her emphasis turns to the power of meaning-making, a central theme in phenomenology:

My experience of grief in my Lifeworld has brought me to a place of peace and safety with my loss and separation from my lost love object, which is my father. I have hope and my human behavior is not of one who has no hope. (protocol, 2019)

In this instance, a profoundly traumatic personal experience, one never to be repeated, has been re-activated, then filtered through phenomenological writing. Trailing a long history of involuntary memories, she squarely acknowledges the abiding emotional scars that persist, yet brings us, finally, to a high endpoint: hope.
Failure

This student’s early years were missing the social prompts to pursue the development of her innate talent, to master newly learned skills, to exhibit fidelity to obligation and duty, to take pride from the satisfaction of work well done, to meet personal challenges and overcome them through sustained accomplishment. Yet our doctoral student from the Virgin Islands tells her story as just that. Even though failure was the hallmark and social surround of her youth, she instinctively rejected it as unacceptable, abnormal. But not without strenuous determination.

Showing her spirit of defiance at the very outset of her protocol writing she declares, “failure is a great teacher.” Then she freely admits the seeds of power to transmute negative experience were not planted in her childhood garden. She recounts:

I remember thinking to myself, how I had very few role models throughout my secondary education. There were some educators who saw value in my constant failures and encouraged me to ‘fail toward success.’ But few placed their hands on my shoulders and assisted me with being my brilliant self. The education system was probably the first place where I felt like a true failure. (protocol, 2019)

She describes her secret rumination, “I was convinced due to the actions, words and thinking of others that failure must be connected to my lot in life.” Her social roots are in a Deathworld of human failure, the ubiquitous loss and denial of one’s innate ability to create a good life.

Compounding the false narrative of failure, her own mother seemed to betray her by holding her back one year to repeat the second grade. The message was unavoidable. “This was a jail sentence as far as I was concerned. How could she be so cruel and heartless? I passed the second grade and she was failing me! I carried this stain of embarrassment and failure throughout my life.”

Nevertheless, following the phenomenological protocol sequence, with emphasis on imaginative variations (Husserl 1913/1931; Moustakas 1994), in particular, an effusion of new perspectives on an old memory came to light:

Instead of my mother’s plan, we could have worked with my teacher on ways to support my reading. My teacher could have played a more significant role by offering strategies to strengthen my reading during the year. To complement the instruction I received in school, a tutor could have been assigned to me. My teacher could have created an in-class book club for my classmates and me where we could have read books that interested us. Conversely, my mother could have mirrored the same activity for our family. Using the time to support my sisters and me rather than singling me out. Participating in reading circles held at our local library could have been another option, offering more opportunities to intersect with reading in a fun and nonjudgmental environment. In my opinion, any one or all of the suggestions listed above could have been used in this scenario. (protocol, 2019)
Is there room for Transformative Phenomenology at the adult stage of life through recalling painful formative childhood experiences even long after one has crossed fully into adulthood? The student reflects, “Since failure is a lived experience and everyone will be met with some form of failing, why not embrace it as a phenomenal life experience?” It is this balanced realization, made possible after she had bracketed “failure,” met failure on its own terms, that finally transmuted the paralysis of “failure” into opportunity.

**Healing**

Skeptical of healing, the student, recalling the poignant experience of her grandmother’s death, states her resistance:

> I wasn’t too convinced in the power of healing at that time, nor counseling either. I always thought I was strong enough to deal with issues on my own. However, when grief and depression started affecting my life and daily functioning, my parents insisted on counseling. I hesitantly attended the first three sessions not opening up, not exploring my feelings. One day I was feeling especially down and my counselor suggested that I use a journal and write down what was bothering me. (protocol, 2019)

Her first brush with journaling opened the floodgates:

> That black and white writing pad changed my life! I jotted down my innermost thoughts and later discussed them with her. It became the highlight of my week to attend the sessions because, not only I was opening up, I was feeling better. This greatly influenced my faith in healing and the counseling process. (protocol, 2019)

Sometime thereafter, her mother passed away. Just one month after her mother died, she felt pressed by the question once more of what healing is, of how one must come to terms with reality, to “transition into a healthier mindset.”

Following the protocol writing stages, now seen as a deeper guided process than journaling, the student began to bracket (van Manen 1990) specific elements of her grief. Through the bracketing effort, she was able to turn them into potent positive prompts:

> Healing is not a phenomenon that is readily accepted or understood. I was skeptical about the healing process and had to completely abandon my own thoughts and biases [through bracketing] (mainly needing scientific proof) and trust the steps. With faith and open mindedness, I came to peel away the layers of my grief and overcome them. Additionally, as a healer, I practiced having confidence in my skill to heal others. I have faith in my educational background as well as my experiences that I am a competent healer in my field. Acceptance was the most difficult layer to conquer! I can finally say that my mom is deceased to others. Up until this time, I was unable to outwardly write, speak or
even think that my mom was no longer alive. I was stuck on the denial stage for over a year. Through healing, I am able to understand and accept her passing. (protocol, 2019)

In the end, following weeks of phenomenological writing, she clearly states:

Schütz and Luckmann (1973/1989) posit that stocks of knowledge are related to situations and experiences. Stocks of knowledge help us define and master situations. In my case, my experience with grief and death as well as my training in the subjects helped me to reflect on and transition from my state of denial. I finally admitted that I was not in a healthy state of mind and needed to take steps and seek help. Additionally, my experiences working with others with similar experiences helped me to identify and correct in myself my abnormal reaction. (protocol, 2019)

Her admissions of transformative change support the theory that even initial exposure and early practice in writing phenomenology can have a profound impact. It is not viewed by practitioners as a single occurrence; rather, phenomenological writers view it as an ongoing process, performing afresh the protocol writing cycle and, with each turn, deepening the writer’s awareness and mastery, discernment, and understanding, enriching the full meaning of an underlying state of affairs.

The Qualities of Transformative Phenomenologists

Signposts of proper phenomenological engagement were presented as a list of Qualities of Transformative Phenomenologists (Rehorick/Bentz 2017). This list was distributed to all students in this project. The signs are:

- adopting phenomenology as a way of being
- embracing embodied consciousness
- writing rich descriptions and collaboratively interpreting meaning
- embracing authenticity and wonderment
- adding to theory, method and the understanding of phenomena
- awareness of Lifeworlds as constructed through patterns of communication
- immersing in the work of our founders and colleagues
- working from the “Epoche” – looking beyond the taken-for-granted
- finding the “whatness” of experience
- transcending the everyday reality of lived experience

The many writings offered up by our doctoral students clearly evinced all of the qualities. For brevity, let’s touch on a few: embracing embodied consciousness, authenticity and wonderment, and finding the “whatness” of experience.
Requesting that students focus on writing about poignant experiences opened fissures revealing reservoirs of deep feelings. Many reports were of a traumatic nature, as in the death of a loved one, a panic attack, or the overwhelming experience of a first love. Naturally, the bodily experience of extreme occurrences is entwined with the mental/social experience to the point that, in more than one instance, it is impossible to fairly disentangle which is producing the dominant influence.

In the case of the death of one’s father, the environment seemed suddenly shut off. Her experience was that of being captured in a bubble. Being encapsulated bodily is a suffocating experience. She further described the alien sensation of paralysis. She couldn’t move, couldn’t speak, was locked in indecision as to what to do next. When trauma of the mind, especially when goaded by the shocking sudden death of one’s most significant other, one’s father, takes over, the body simply goes limp. The recognition that one’s body won’t take action on its own and requires an exceptional intentional effort even to raise one’s hand is awkward, alien, numbing, frightening.

We heard an authentic voice describe the experience of being hit by a car at age four, how natural affectionate love of a family intermingled with the clinical expertise of medical professionals, a powerful generative brew that immersed the child for nearly a year following the incident. We heard authentic voices describe the terror of enduring hurricanes as they were left clutching to life while treacherous storms ravaged their island home.

Speaking with an authentic voice opens a path that leads one deeper, to the issue of “whatness,” meaning, what really is rooted underneath the surface perception of the experience? At this point, the work became most challenging. For example, getting to the whatness, what is the root, the essence meant by one student who described the exhilarating experience of his first love? He couldn’t immediately identify the essence of it. He says so early on:

My initial feel for the assignment was just the mere idea of explaining the sequence of events that I thought was deemed appropriate to describe this euphoric state. That perception was incorrect. In fact, the assignment comprised a transformational journey that not only highlighted my lack of knowledge of what I felt at the time, but the miscues I encountered due to my novice actions. With reflective work such as protocol writing one is forced not only to question regular events but also to create a stage of heightened awareness that applies to other facets of life, not just the subject, the phenomenon under study.

(protocol, 2019)

That is a voice of authenticity, a voice speaking of the whatness of life. When you read several pages of his protocol uninterrupted it makes your stomach feel queasy. Just like your own first love did. That is the voice of authenticity, of whatness, of wonderment.
Collaborating with Strangers

We asked our students to reflect on the impact of being a “stranger” while engaging in collaboration through “writing phenomenology.” We asked them to reflect upon the impact of sharing a phenomenon of deep personal significance with others. What was it like to enter into “we-relationships” (Wagner 1970) as they shared their protocols with their fellow learners? Anxiety, vulnerability, discovery, intimacy, openness, empathy, and embracing diversity were some themes that emerged, pointing to the essence of what it is to collaborate. Some of these themes are encompassed in the following statements by our students.

From the What to the How

One student described how being fully aware of the meaning-making potential of collaboration can lead to revelations about the hidden nature of a phenomenon, akin to the phenomenological reduction espoused by Husserl.3 “The act of being conscious of collaboration . . . provides a way to make meaning of the ‘what’ we are doing and gives insight into the ‘how.’ In this respect, we are consciously collaborating; which I believe is powerful.”

Collaboration

Another writer comments on the emergence of a sense of community: “As we continue to share our phenomenological writing and give each other feedback . . . layers of ‘stranger-ness’ continue to peel away.” While another makes a deep somatic connection through the sharing of poignant expressions with others:

Collaborating with strangers were also moments of deep intimacy when the only thing I could do was to live the deep empathy for what I read while feeling and embracing the other, knowing that I had either touched an unknown expression of the other’s humanness or I deeply touched myself through the eyes, hands, movements, and heart of the other. (protocol, 2019)

Two participants commented that “collaborating with strangers has improved as I worked to get to know classmates on a deeper level through their work” and that

3 Husserl’s phenomenological reduction spans from “noema” (that to which we orient ourself) to “noesis” (the interpretative act directed to an intentional object) – through asking “what is the nature of the phenomenon?” to asking, “how is the phenomenon experienced?” (Moustakas 1994).
“collaborating with others is to embrace the possibility to reach new horizons and to build things that I could never build alone.” Sharing poignant experiences through phenomenological writing can offer a breakthrough to further exploration:

What I find most interesting is what experiences my colleagues choose to share. Everyone seems to have distinct poignant experiences, so much so that the experiences seem to drive both their scholarly work and careers . . . sharing my experiences with strangers did not come across as tough, but rather redundant . . . writing phenomenology turned the broken record off . . . in sharing my lived experiences . . . I discovered that I have so much more to discover and talk about, than what I planned. Sharing these experiences with others has been a platform for discovery. (protocol, 2019)

Many of our students affirmed that they developed a deeper understanding of their phenomena, through the sharing of protocols, and the collaborative interpretation of meaning.

Anxiety

Students who come to Transformative Phenomenology for the first time often experience the push-pull of engaging with a new way of seeing and meaning-making⁴ that is summed up in the following contribution:

The initial experience of collaborating with strangers is riddled with anxiety and excitement. You are given the option of revealing your true self or presenting a façade to maintain your privacy. At some point, in phenomenological studies, you have to decide whether you want a genuine experience of learning and growing through sharing or if you want to make a minimal contribution in order to move forward. For some, it is easy to share their truths, but for others, it might be more difficult. I find it much easier to share truths with strangers rather than those who are closest to me. I think this is because there is no vested relationship with a stranger in which I am fearful of being judged. However, I will admit, I do not bare my soul, but will allow for information sharing at the appropriate time. (protocol, 2019)

For this student, the anxiety was reduced when social-distance from fellow student-strangers created a space where she did not feel judged for “speaking” her “truth.”⁵

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⁴ “[Students] experienced the push-pull and feelings of hopelessness-dismay while trying to make sense of what phenomenological thinking is all about, how they could apply it to their own lives and projects, and what kept bringing them back to try again and again.” (Rehorick/Bentz 2008, p.23)

⁵ The sociologist Georg Simmel observed that the stranger “often receives the most surprising openness – confidences which sometimes have the character of a confessional and which would be carefully withheld from a more closely related person”. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Wolff 1950).
Vulnerability

There was a certain sense of vulnerability shared by students who willingly divulged their deeply personal protocols with other students. The following two writers succinctly summarized the perceived “opportunity and threats” involved in sharing, yet recognized value in their mutual vulnerability, through writing phenomenology, as a basis for entering into we-relationships:

Being vulnerable is something that I have always struggled with, and this course is making me address a weakness. The fear of being judged, misunderstood, and/or rejected always runs through my mind. Thoughts of coming across the wrong way and having to defend myself because I jumped to conclusions, haunts me . . . reading the experiences of others, allows me to feel like I know them through their experiences. Starting this course, I was very unsure of how this would work out but seeing, hearing, and exploring their words have helped also to encourage me and forced me to think beyond myself.

As I approach collaborating with strangers, there is both an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity is the potential to make new connections that enrich my life. Perhaps this person will teach me something about myself, or the world, that I don’t know. Maybe I can add value to their life . . . I also think that the nature of phenomenological writing causes us to open up in a way that we don’t typically do with strangers, thus expediting the vulnerability and connection process. (protocol, 2019)

It took courage and trust to overcome any reticence to share with strangers. But, for those who did, the reward, new ways of seeing and meaning making, was often well worth the effort.

Diversity

And finally, students recognized that learning together benefited from the feedback from engagement with others from different far-flung worlds who bring different vantages: “Overall, collaborating with strangers has been useful in that when you collaborate outside of the usual network, you are blessed with diverse feedback.” Another stated:

Alternate perspectives are another benefit of collaborating with strangers, as most of my colleagues are from different parts of the country, as well as lead lives much different from my own. Diversity among strangers can be so rich and valuable in the learning environment, but I think even more so when it applies to research studies of phenomena or any topic for that matter. (protocol, 2019)

These students affirmed the value of non-judgmental feedback from strangers.
Signs of Transformation

One of the surest signs of transformation is “surprise.” When a phenomenological writer hits upon an astonishing discovery that was completely unforeseen, but welcome, freeing, empowering it fills one with a quiet satisfied sense of inner personal accomplishment. That’s one way to describe the recurrent transformation phenomenologists undergo. It is the well from which they draw sustenance. We found early, promising signs of this in student writings.

Young lives are rarely set on parallel tracks, though that fact may be difficult for the young at heart to appreciate or accept. As divergent trajectories of life take hold, there are absences that cannot be wished away:

I distinctly remembered sitting on the curbside at UVI, thinking to myself, “Absence does not make your heart grow fonder, it sends your mind into a quandary. Being alone with my thoughts of love, without any reciprocation was hard-hitting. Grief is the price we pay for love. My first semester at UVI made me realize how vital it is to separate what is real from what I feel. In this instant a level of growth and understanding was achieved through this impending hardship. (protocol, 2019)

His acceptance that the once heroic zenith of love would succumb to all that is merely mundane posed a transformation. Most might refuse it. Seeing that his most prized reality had taken an irrevocable turn and he had to follow is perhaps the most challenging transformation anyone can willingly endure.

A second instance of transformation is demonstrated in our student’s recounting of a young life filled with a narrative of failure. Her private Deathworld gave way to an adult life of realism and balance, celebrating new possibilities through an honest appraisal of how failure always has in it the seeds of hidden success, if one will only press on and use a circumspect approach to resolving life’s challenging issues.

The transformation in her story begins at the headwaters of enforced mediocrity finally giving way to a world of creative opportunity. In this case, transformation may be thought of as an about-face in attitude. By making the 180-degree turn, she gained the power of interpretation, powers of meaning-making that turned on its head the accepted wisdom of leading a life of defeat.

For her, transformation was akin to shedding an old skin only to find new life waiting beneath. Her transformation wasn’t necessarily a radical change in her nature, only the radical change in which aspect of her nature she chose to live out of.
Summary

The many students around the world who participated in the Strangers to Collaborators project had never been exposed to phenomenology before, as far as we know. That means that their motivation to engage with it arose largely out of a common sense of duty to do well in a traditional classroom setting.

Our students took on the challenge of phenomenological writing not knowing what it was or where it would lead. Some read the source material, but not all. For those who did, the point of the class took on some theoretical boundaries, a framework in which to explore. For those who chose not to immerse themselves in the readings, the writing came with a bit more difficulty. And it wasn’t the phenomenological side of it that proved most challenging. Their first challenge was trusting that they were in a safe learning environment where strangers could be relied upon to read and comment on each other’s work without judgment, without violating their mates’ vulnerabilities openly exposed by the learning process, and without making anyone feel foolish or guilty.

And they did it. They stepped over the line. When they did, when they wrote, shared, commented, and repeated the process, they found the barriers between them falling. They found they had more in common than they first guessed. Shocked by this New World approach, collaborative learning was not an easy adjustment. But the real payoff came when so many found that this new methodology, phenomenological writing, really had teeth. It was potent to aid in making sense of life’s challenges. It led to deeper perceptions of life than had previously been accessible. In the end, it was freeing, empowering, and transformative.

References

Chapter 8 Restoring Lifeworlds Through Phenomenological Writing


Abstract: This chapter is an exploration of be-ing with my son as he was dying of cancer at the age of 22. I used a process of self-reflection facilitated by writing phenomenological protocols. The sample of these writings articulates an exploration of just what it means to be-ing with dying. I look at my own experience as data. Taken together as a whole, phenomenology writing protocols are tools that assist us in taking a deep dive into our own experience.

Keywords: being with, dying, Deathworld, Lifeworld, phenomenology, self-reflection

Introduction

As a species we are experiential beings. Every day, every moment that we live brings with it an experience. We pay no attention to most of these experiences and moments. Instead, we end up taking them for granted until they begin to wane or disappear. It is common to find ourselves not living in the moment, but to push through life to get to future moments when we assume we will have time to live in the present. And so it was with me until my son’s diagnosis with cancer at the age of 19. He died at age 22.

Arriving at My Experience of Be-ing with Dying

When my youngest son was diagnosed with cancer (Hodgkin’s Disease). He, like most young adults, was full of vim and vigor. He was a university student, living on his own, supporting himself, feeling as though he was at the beginning of adult life. He thought of himself as invincible in more ways than one, and it truly seemed that way for a while. He started chemotherapy and easily went into remission. But when cancer returned 18 months later, it was resistant to several high-dose chemotherapy regimens, indicating that the disease was