

**Discolasures of a Different Kind:
Examining Analyses Processes in a Phenomenological Project Based in
Disability Studies**

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In August, 2007, AUTHOR and RESEARCHER, another Canadian colleague in adapted physical activity, were invited to attend a summer symposium in Oslo, Norway on phenomenology and disability. That symposium was the impetus for their formulating a phenomenological inquiry into “the other adult” in inclusive physical activity contexts. The “other adult” in question is the person working in a support capacity who is not a parent, a teacher or a primary intervenor or care-giver, but who is literally the “other adult” present in ongoing, albeit contextually circumscribed fashion, in the life of a disabled child, youth or adult. Both AUTHOR and RESEARCHER had been interested in the taken for granted character of this other adult role and the assumptions undergirding its relational necessity and benefits as well as its potential for mediating interactions and encounters among same aged peers both with and without disabilities. Conventional wisdom in both adapted physical activity and special education supports the presence of a support worker (an other adult) to ameliorate various environments and social situations for persons with disabilities. While the motivations are presumably well meaning and facilitatory, these relational complexities had not to date been examined in any empirical depth and certainly not from a phenomenological perspective. Thus, the Other Adult project was born. AUTHOR and RESEARCHER were successful in procuring a research grant to carry out the study and divided between them the labours of consulting with insiders. RESEARCHER’s portion of the data collection was based in gathering insiders’ accounts from persons with disabilities who received support from an Other Adult and teachers in inclusive contexts. AUTHOR’s responsibilities were to gather insider accounts from Other Adults and parents of children, youth and adults with disabilities. Once the insider accounts had been collected, AUTHOR and RESEARCHER conducted analyses of the data sets separately using strategies that were coherent in their phenomenological orientation and different enough to allow for a healthy heterogeneity, thus providing internal cross checks on soundness and trustworthiness.

The paper on which the examination of analysis is based, Describing a Collaborative Group –Based Phenomenological Analysis describes the analysis process conceived, organized and deployed by AUTHOR on the insider accounts collected from the Other Adults. 40 narratives were written by Other Adult respondents in response to one of the following prompts:
a) tell me about an experience when you felt you did something right in your service provision

for the child, youth or adult you are supporting; b) tell me about an experience when no matter how hard you tried you did not feel successful in your service provision for the child, youth or adult you are supporting. The specifics of the analysis process will be described in detail as *this* paper on Disclosures of a Different Kind unfolds; however, I will include the findings of the analysis here in order to provide further context. The analysis disclosed four distinct types of narrative –heroic, interrupted, troubling and empathetic. Heroic narratives were those where the Other Adult’s role is central, emphasized and acknowledged in achieving a desired outcome; interrupted narratives were those where the saga-like quality of the Other Adult’s intervention was forestalled (literally, interrupted) by the child, youth or adult “ sabotaging “ the expected or desired outcome; troubling narratives were those where the Other Adult engaged in tactics that were extreme, and bordering on injurious, abusive or exploitative in service of an outcome; empathetic narratives were those where the outcome was subordinated to the person being supported and the Other Adult was in a more mundane, unpretentious and understated companion role. With this foregrounding context in place, we will now shift the focus of the remainder of the paper onto the analysis process itself.

This paper is primarily a braided description of the design feature of analysis of qualitative data (in particular, first person narratives), and the unexpected level of disclosure we were able to discern through the analysis processes. The larger effort in which the analysis is embedded was the aforementioned hermeneutic phenomenological project investigating the “other adult” in inclusive educational settings involving persons with disabilities. I will not be elaborating further on any findings from that study in this paper. Rather, I will be focusing on how using a group-based approach to analysis of lived experience narratives within a phenomenological study enabled the group to engage in methodological conduct which deepened our understanding of the components of the analysis process and the premises of hermeneutic phenomenology. The group approach is substantiated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s proposition that phenomenology is a form of co-existence in which the broadening of our views and understandings evolves from placing our experiences into dialogue with those of others and the world (1995/1964, 100-101). This, then implicates our version of phenomenological comportment as “defensible” as a qualitative methodology in human science through intelligible description of actual enacted and interactively validated research behaviors.

Other theoretical premises at work in this paper reside in the work of Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky. Freire claimed that learners alienated from their own forms of expression also experience alienation from the larger culture and from their sense of themselves as cultural agents. This alienation is painfully evident when students attempt to apply their previously assessed knowledge in an applied context and experience a profound disconnect between knowledge they assumed was grasped and the practical knowledge that the situation demands. In effect, they are without a form of expression even though they have the assessment grade which supposedly attests to some level of expertise. Their grasp of the subject matter is, in Freire’s terms, naïve - literal to the extent that it is practically useless. They cannot move beyond a single formulation of the problem before them nor create possible solutions or responses to it.

Vygotsky is equally cogent in his emphasis on the move from maximally compacted inner speech to maximally elaborated outer speech, that is, communicating knowledge in ways that people other than oneself can engage with in meaningful ways. This is not to suggest that moving beyond literal learning or maximally compact inner speech is in any sense a taken for granted or easily achieved learning objective; indeed, these moves are transformative and are usually the result of deep learning, and often involve threshold concepts. Freire also insists on learners engaging knowledge at the level of culture and Vygotsky further complements this with his compelling work on proximal learning, the power of learning from peers and other community members in both constructed and natural settings.

Freire's archeology of consciousness also includes the superstitious and critical levels. Superstitious thinkers and writers are able to move beyond a singular and unchanging way of viewing social and cultural phenomena and can imagine a number of perspectives. However, their language usage is peppered with monolithic structures (society, media, " they") indicating awareness of larger structures yet also indicating their own lack of awareness of how these might work or function and their relationships to and within them. Critical levels see a different engagement with discourse and language structures. Both Freire and Vygotsky see language use as a window on the writer's relationship with larger cultural forces. We saw examples of all three uses of language and insider discourse displayed with surprising regularity in the narratives we analyzed. We were also made more aware of these tendencies by virtue of using Giorgi's analytic techniques of meaning units and specific and general descriptions and van Manen's analytic techniques of idiomatic phrases, word etymologies, and the lifeworld existentials of body, space, time and relation. The recursive and attuned writing and re-writing process is characteristic of both Giorgi and van Manen and is also encouraged by Merleau Ponty : when I write I discover what it is I wish to say.

The paper will discuss the "disclosures of a different kind" and their relationship to the writing, poetic, group and analysis processes.