



Transformative Phenomenology and Us

A Bouquet of Reflections on the Impact of
Transformative Phenomenology

Students and Graduates of David Allan Rehorick Ph.D. and Valerie
Malhotra Bentz Ph.D., Fielding Graduate University, 2018

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Transformative Phenomenology and Us

Dedication

To our beloved Valerie and David,
Thank you for your teachings, mentoring, coaching,
inspiration, friendship, and love.



David and Valerie (Vancouver, Feb 2018)

About This Booklet

During the process of writing a chapter titled, “The Silver Age of Phenomenology at Fielding Graduate University” in *The Fielding 45th Anniversary Monograph* (to be published in 2019), the authors¹ of the chapter invited Fielding phenomenologists to reflect the impact of Transformative Phenomenology. The chapter includes the synthesis of the reflections as *Our Collective Story*, but each reflection statement deserves to be read and shared among many people. This booklet is a compilation of these reflection statements.

The initial 19 contributors of the chapter and this booklet responded to the invitation of,

Please describe the transformative aspect of Transformative Phenomenology for YOU, whether it is professionally, scholarly, and/or personally. (In what way TP impacted you most? What changed?, How you (and/or your practice) are different now after experiencing TP? OR In what way “transformative” for you? etc.)

The invitation message was distributed in October 2018 through the SPCL (Somatics Phenomenology and Communicative Leadership) community email listing, and to the graduates who had conducted phenomenology-based (PB) dissertations during 1996 – 2016.

As phenomenologists, we are always on a path of becoming, and so is this booklet. We invite you to join us with your reflection. Please contact Ayumi Nishii at anishii@email.fielding.edu or James Marlatt at jmarlatt@email.fielding.edu for submissions or questions.

Ayumi Nishii, Ph.D.
James Marlatt, Ph.D.
Editors, December 2018

¹ James Marlatt, Ayumi Nishii, Carol Estrada, Barton Buechner, Valerie Bentz, and David Rehorick

Transformative Phenomenology

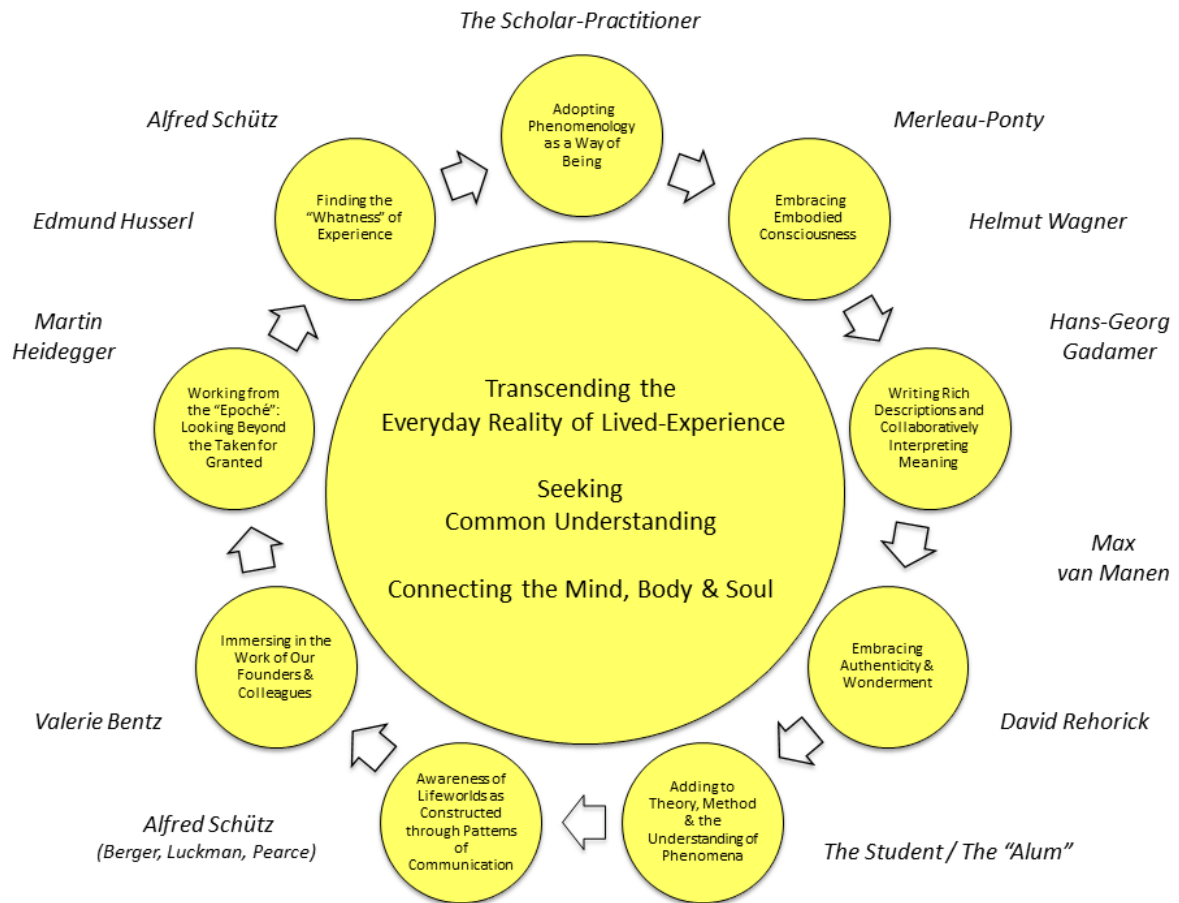
A short introduction of Transformative Phenomenology

What is Transformative Phenomenology?

Transformative Phenomenology is a somatic-hermeneutic-phenomenology that is put into action in the lifeworld. It is an application of phenomenology—the study of consciousness and phenomena— that can lead to personal, professional, organizational, and social transformations. *Transformative Phenomenology* is founded on the eidetic phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, the embodied phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the ontologic-existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, and the reflective hermeneutic methods of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Rehorick and Bentz (2017) identified ten qualities of phenomenological scholar-practitioners based on their analysis of 76 phenomenological and hermeneutic related dissertations completed at Fielding from 1996 to 2016. Writing rich descriptions of lived experience and collaboratively interpreting meaning is a foundational activity. Additional qualities include adopting phenomenology as a way of being and embracing embodied consciousness, wonderment and authenticity. Phenomenological scholar-practitioners are focused on looking beyond the taken for granted, with awareness that lifeworlds are constructed through patterns of communication. Transformative phenomenologists seek to transcend the reality of everyday lived-experience in service of generating common understanding.

Ten Qualities of Transformative Phenomenologists



The Silver Age of Phenomenology at Fielding Graduate University

A chapter in the Fielding 45th Anniversary Monograph (Fielding University Press, to be published in 2019)

Written by James Marlatt, Ayumi Nishii, Carol Estrada, Bart Buechner, Valerie Bentz, and David Rehorick, with Fielding Phenomenologists

Abstract

Akin to the “Golden Age” of phenomenology at the New School for Social Research from the mid 1950-70s that brought European phenomenology as a way of investigating the social world, the “Silver Age” of phenomenological research and practice at Fielding began in 1996 with the introduction of an advanced module in phenomenological research for doctoral students led by Valerie Bentz and David Rehorick. This experience culminated with the development of what Bentz and Rehorick call *Transformative Phenomenology*—a somatic-hermeneutic-phenomenology that is put into action in the lifeworld. It is an application of phenomenology that can lead to personal, professional, organizational, and social transformations. This chapter delineates a short history of phenomenology at Fielding, describes some of the characteristics of *Transformative Phenomenology*, and tells a collective story of its positive impact on the students and graduates, and their fields of practice. The legacy of Valerie Bentz and David Rehorick continues to evolve through the Fielding Somatics, Phenomenology and Communicative Leadership (SPCL) teaching concentration and an active SPCL community-of-practice.



Photo (Left to Right): Jeremy Shapiro, Ph.D., Valerie Malhotra Bentz, Ph.D., David Rehorick, Ph.D.

Content

Part 1: A Short History of Phenomenology at Fielding

Part 2: Characteristics of Transformative Phenomenology

Part 3: The Impact: Our Collective Story

Epilogue



Fielding phenomenologists (Part 3 contributors) – from the Chapter

Want to Know More? Check Out These Books

Former students of Valerie Bentz and David Rehorick contributed chapters to the edited volumes that outline the transformative impact of phenomenology on their research, practice and lives. These authors provide rich stories of the diverse practices that embody *truthful* communication to address practical concerns in the lifeworld from the diverse vantage of the executive coach, human development professionals, leadership specialists, company executives, directors of medical organizations, professional musicians, community social innovators, and more.

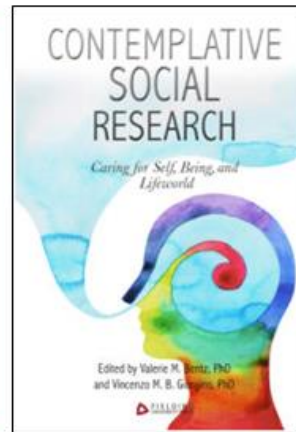
See the publication information on the Bibliography page at the end.



1998



2008



2016



2017

Reflections

Written by the students of

Professors Valerie Malhotra Bentz, PhD & David Allan Rehorick, PhD

Adair Nagata, Ph.D.

Transformative Phenomenology was foundational for my dissertation on embodied empathic resonance enabling me to recognize the phenomenon of *bodymindfulness*, to practice it, and coin the term. My living experience of Transformative Phenomenology provided the impetus for my becoming a Senior Facilitator of *Personal Leadership-Making a World of Difference*® and for teaching it in a master of arts in intercultural relations program. My research was personally transformational and enabled me to engage my students in embarking on similar paths of self-development.



Dissertation: Somatic Mindfulness and Energetic Presence in Intercultural Communication: A Phenomenological/Hermeneutic Exploration of Bodymindset and Emotional Resonance (2002)

Ann Alexander, M.A.

Beginning in 2011, I began an irresistible learning journey in Transformative Phenomenology under the guidance of Valerie Bentz and David Rehorick. During the next five years I continued to take courses in phenomenology, which included exploring advanced research methods and writing phenomenological descriptions.

At the time I enrolled in my first phenomenology course, I had no idea what phenomenology was or even how to pronounce the word. The coursework was intense and moved along quickly from one assignment to the next. It stretched my thinking in new and unique ways, opening new pathways for my intellectual development. Transformative Phenomenology has expanded my way of being in the world. I have become more reflective, asking different questions and looking at situations and events from different perspectives.

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation titled, “The Accidental Phenomenologist: Becoming a Phenomenologist and a Schutzian Scholar.”

Ayumi Nishii, Ph.D.

Phenomenology (including hermeneutics) was new to me when I started the doctoral journey. It was not easy to digest and is still challenging, but at the same time I always resonated with it. It gave me a feeling of homecoming and a relief from the supremacy of the scientific mode of knowing. Phenomenology made me value the knowing within and nuanced differences in experiences within self or others. It impacted how I do scholarly and professional work in many ways, but the most meaningful impact is ones on a personal level. As the phenomenological qualities and attitudes becoming a part of my habit, I reflect my *fore-structure* (biases, preknowledge, or ladder of inference) more often and deeper, and this act makes me appreciate others as precious human-fellows who have their own fore-structures. It is not that I did not do this before, but the experience of *doing* phenomenology definitely put me on a higher level of consciousness.

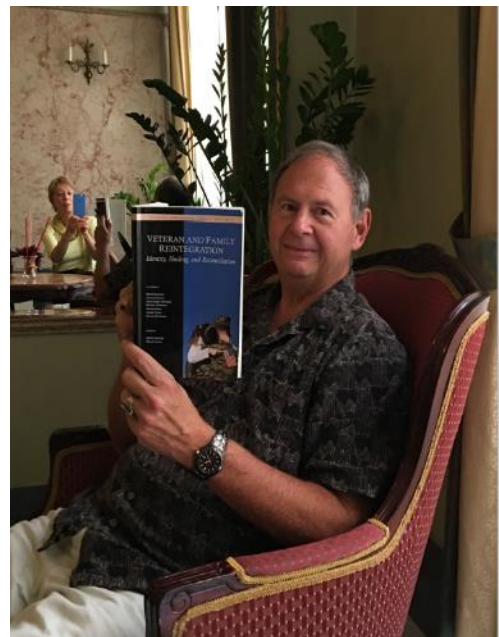


Dissertation: Servanthood as Love, Relationships, and Power: A Heideggerian Hermeneutic Study of the Experience of Servant-Leaders (2017)

Bart Buechner, Ph.D.

How does “transformation” actually happen?

My encounter with phenomenology at Fielding opened some doors of understanding of a matter that I considered to be of primary importance to my work with veterans. Empirical methods of measuring and describing the impact of combat experience on the human psyche over many years have resulted in a hefty collection of data and percentages, but the meaning of this data was obscured by apparent contradictions and lack of precision around what is actually being measured, and how consistently and rigorously empirical protocols were being applied. Simply described, many veterans were not “buying in” to the clinical definition of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) being pushed by the clinical trauma therapy community, and there were substantive accounts of “posttraumatic growth” that ran counter to the narrative of pathology. This resulted in a critical question: “what makes the difference between outcomes of dysfunction and dysregulation, and personal growth?”



Literature from the clinical psychology and psychotherapy fields was not particularly helpful in answering this question. Journal articles were laden with jargon and seemingly contradictory definitions of terminology. At the same time, direct, authentic voices of the veterans themselves seemed to be missing. The study of phenomenology, and use of phenomenological methods to get to “the things themselves” offered an alternative path to examine the phenomenon of combat trauma from the perspective of those who have

experienced it, and also to study the essences of the accounts of those who have experienced growth after this undeniably life-changing experience.

I have since found that teaching phenomenology as part of the research methods course in a military psychology program that includes a substantial number of combat veterans has continued to open windows of insight for making sense of otherwise ineffable experience. The “transformation” in transformative phenomenology in this context is in many ways a transformation of perspective; an enlargement of horizons; an expansion of consciousness. While it is not a simple way forward, nor in conformance with what the empiricists in the field consider to be an “evidence based” and replicable methodology, it does carry the authority of authenticity, and the capacity to open new channels of thought and action. As Fielding Professor Emeritus David Rehorick put it, phenomenology offers the potential contribution of “essence based evidence” to the practice of the human sciences. And combat trauma is an essentially human phenomenon.

The rigorous phenomenological examination of trauma experience and trauma narratives is not the easiest path, but it may be the broadest one. It connects lived experience to a fuller and more robust range of theoretical perspectives that can be used to better understand, and change response to, challenging life events. Framed in this way, the practices of trauma studies and therapy can intersect with other bodies of theory in the human sciences, such as transformative learning (TL) and the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) to change trajectories from a more holistic (and postmodern) perspective. In the case of transformative learning, a phenomenological “thick description” of the “disorienting dilemmas” created by combat experiences can be turned into personal growth and enlargement of perspective. In the case of CMM, the experiencer and co-enquirer can engage in re-framing the way that trauma narratives are contextualized and communicated in both intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues, and deliberately co-construct a better (or more evolved) future identity and social role.

While the foregoing discussion may appear a bit complex (because in theory, it is) it does not have to be complicated in practice. As one Vietnam veteran I worked with in a writing workshop put it at the end of a poem that he wrote afterwards, “phenomenology is good for veterans.” When asked what this meant, he tearfully stated (in essence) that if what he had just experienced (in a space of shared and open phenomenological co- inquiry in community of other veterans) had been available when he returned from Vietnam, the last forty years of his life would not have been as painful as they had been for him. This is a transformative conversation worth continuing and expanding.

Dissertation: Contextual Mentoring of Student Veterans: A Communication Perspective
(2014)

Carol Estrada, M.A.

My introduction to Phenomenology took place my very first term at Fielding when I took Writing Phenomenology with Valerie. I fell in love with van Manen's writing protocols. In pulling my thoughts together about TP I went back taking some time in working my way through the protocols as relating to Transformative Phenomenology.

Essence of Transformative Phenomenology

Touching
Radical
Adventurous
Near
Self-reflective
First-person
Opening
Rising to surface
Mind-bending
Affirmative
Truth
Individual
Valued
Experiential

Participatory
Heart-filled
Engaging
Necessary
Original
Mindful
Exciting
Nurturing
Of one's own
Loving
Organic
Grounded
YES!



Carol Laberge, Ph. D.

Transformative Phenomenology changed my view of the world both personally, professionally and scholarly. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about how things are affecting both my and people's consciousness around me, in terms of interpretation of meaning. Being in the same room with peers, staff, students and family, I believe Transformative Phenomenology has taught me how to be humble and have patience in everyday life, resulting in what I interpret as a sense of inner calmness.

In my professional and family life, from the boardroom, to day to day operations, coaching, mentoring and strategizing with staff, reviewing student's writing assignments and watching my adult children grow through their journey in the world, I carry my transformative phenomenological lens.

None of this would have been possible without having had my time at Fielding, in what I now coin as the "Fielding Feeling".



Dissertation: The Lived Experience of Heart Attack: Individual Accounts of Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention Survivors (2012)

Daniel Maxwell, Ph.D.



When I first heard the word – phenomenology – it sounded complex, forbidding even. But as I learned more about it from Dr. Bentz and other Fielding faculty, my thinking was transformed. Phenomenology wasn't just a deep philosophical movement, it was practical and useful in everyday life. Transformative phenomenology, as practiced at Fielding, provided a way to enter the lifeworld(s) of other human beings and even animals to a lesser extent. This too proved to be a profound and life-changing experience for me. For in the practice of phenomenology, I not only gained knowledge of the world but of myself as well.

Dissertation: Classical Horsemanship: A Phenomenological and Dramatist Study (2013)

David Haddad, Ph.D.

Phenomenology with its central doctrine of intentionality is not a subject one can study with an honest approach without being changed.

As Max Van Manen said, the question isn't what will we do with phenomenology. The question is what will phenomenology do with us?

The challenge and reward of engaging phenomenology is akin to scaling a mountain. The sheer mass of Husserl's body of work and the many scholars who have built up the tradition of this culture of inquiry is staggering. The precision of thought it engenders is enlightening and empowering. Everyone should put in a fair amount of time with phenomenology, if one is to experience second and third loop learning.



Dissertation: Intentionality as an Instrument in Action Research (2002)

Evelyn Torton Beck, Ph.D.²

I came to transformative phenomenology very late in my career, in fact, it was after I had retired from a long career as a university professor who had earned a second Ph.D. (From Fielding, In psychology). After graduation I began to offer sessions using Sacred Circle Dance to embody topics such as “Finding Your Authentic Self” and “Women’s



Development: Child, Maiden, Mother, Crone.” Valerie Bentz joined the seminar and immediately understood what the dance could bring to depth learning. She invited me to bring the dance to her Somatics Intensives which led me to study the rich research that was available. As a result, I was moved to interrogate my own work as a teacher of dance, and began to be more self-aware and sensitive to what was happening in the room with others. *I became especially curious about the transformative power of the dance—how exactly did I experience this? In what ways/ by what means was my psyche/soma sending me such powerful messages? To my*

great surprise, I also became aware of less positive thoughts and feelings (some judgments of myself and others) I was having while dancing, which made me realize that my authentic experience was far more complex than I had first intuited and that for an experience to be transformative it need not be entirely positive. I also became more aware of the impact of my tactile experiences—dancing on a wooden floor created different energy than dancing on a rug or cement. I began also to more consciously take in the energy of the other dancers which enriched the experience for all of us. I already understood that this dance was a vehicle for coming to consciousness in relation to self and other, but now I

² Note from the editor: The sentences in italics were added later by Evelyn after email exchanges with me.

found myself becoming more aware in ways that made me a more sensitive leader who could help others awaken. I was also moved to undertake research into how movement and music created internal change. I also became aware of a phenomenon I had taken for granted: the experience of a woman who danced with us weekly in a large electric wheelchair. Combining phenomenology and somatics approaches, I interviewed everyone in the group, myself included. Entering the world of transformative phenomenology led me to research I would never have otherwise undertaken and has deepened my practice of Sacred Circle Dance. I am forever grateful for this awakening.

The Experience of Sacred Circle Dance in a Wheelchair: A Somatic Phenomenological Case Study: “She’s Not ‘Just’ a Woman in a Wheelchair.” Presented at National Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, Memphis, Tennessee, 2017 [in process of submitting a manuscript for publication]

Frank Rojas, EMBA³

The Social Innovation for Leadership in Work and Life was a transformational experience. I did not imagine that this conference would have affected me so profoundly. Participating in this conference was an empowering experience. My initial motivation for participating in this conference

was to explore phenomenology more deeply. This culture of inquiry was new to me. Historically, my preferred culture of inquiries is oriented to answering “why” questions.” In my life as a scholar and practitioner, I have been most concerned with cause and effect. In fact, when initially ideating



the presentation for this conference, I quickly become stuck in the rut of explaining. My early attempts at writing phenomenology took on a “narrative tone,” depicting a series of events in my life, with one circumstance building to another. Although descriptive and presumably well written, I do not believe I captured the essence of what it is to be a non-

³ Note from the editor: Frank originally wrote this reflection on the experience of a Fielding conference that took place in Surrey, Canada in February 2018. With Frank’s permission, I added the reflection here as he beautifully narrates his experience of transformation through Transformative Phenomenology.

On November 2 of the same year, Frank sent me the photo below with his comment, “*Funny...after the conference in Surry I decided I just wanted to be me so I have been going through a bit of a transformation. I haven’t worn a suit sense February.*”



traditional student. I was approaching this conference mechanically. That was my defense mechanism. It was my efforts to avoid reconciling whom I am versus where I am. I was avoiding understanding, or truly doing a phenomenological exploration.

As the event loomed closer, I prayed and reflected quite a bit on the program. I needed this event to be more than just an opportunity to tell a story and earn course credit. I wanted to transform from this event. This was my opportunity to look at the past thirty years as more than just a sequence of events that have led me to where I am. They have made me. I made the decision to “throw open the kimono” with my presentation. This was the time to embrace by beautiful mistakes. Not run from them but own them. They made me. The phenomenological techniques such as imaginative variation, horizontalization, and bracketing served as a catalyst for that understanding.

While at the conference, I was suffering from “impostor syndrome.” It may have looked like I belonged there; however, in my heart, I felt that I could be asked to leave at any moment. I was in the presence of accomplished social activists, administrators, academics, and authors. Certainly, they would see right through me and know I did not belong. In fact, I listened closely enough I am sure I would hear people whispering about me. I had to hide until I could escape. My initial plan was to lurk in the back of the room until I could flee. Fortunately, my plan backfired. There would be no running.

Saturday was awesome. I fellowshipped with some amazing people who took a genuine interest in me. As the day progressed, I grew more confident and bold in my conversations. In fact, I did something completely uncharacteristically of me; I introduced myself to Dr. Katrina Rodgers. I have always been timid around people in authority that are unknown to me. That little deviation from my usual *modus operandi* was a primer that enabled me to approach my presentation differently.

The time leading up to my presentation was spent in silent prayer and reflection. My intersessions to God were for His presence. As my presentation began, I felt a peace wash

over me. Although I was anxious, I knew God was with me. Even when the computer froze up, I was at peace. The words I needed to say so that I could understand myself, came out. There was power for me at that moment. I cannot speak for anyone else there, but I changed after that I was done. I have a better understanding of who I am. I am comfortable with me. Most importantly, I learned I mattered.

James Marlatt, Ph.D.

A decade ago a serendipitous encounter with David Rehorick opened the door to the realms of Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schütz, Kurt H. Wolff, and Transformative Phenomenology. I feel fortunate, and grateful, to have walked with David and Valerie on a scholarly journey that has taken me, shaken me, and awakened me, to a mindful awareness of the value of looking beyond the taken-for-granted. Through Valerie and David’s “leregogic” mentorship I continue to take steps toward the deeper exploration of the realm of applied phenomenology and somatics. Opportunities to collaborate on writing projects, seminars, and conference presentations continues to build awareness about how our community of transformative phenomenologists can lead social change in complex times. It is the potential of our global community of transformative phenomenologists, and like-minded colleagues, to inspire personal, professional, and lifeworld transformations, that continues to motivate me. This is the legacy of our community that David and Valerie can be proud of.



Dissertation: When Executive Coaching Connects: A Phenomenological Study of Relationship and Transformative Learning (2012)

Lee (Shirley) Knobel, Ph.D.



It seems to me that now, more than ever, we need to truly understand what makes us human. Transformative Phenomenological research is an expressed act of caring, an intentionality to know that which is most essential to our being in the world. I applied a Schutzian lifeworld phenomenology and Gadamerian Hermeneutic framework to my study of the lived experience of Nelson Mandela, encapsulated in the retrospective glance of his letters written to his loved ones during his many years of incarceration on Robben Island. This approach made it possible for me to uncover aspects of Mandela's lifeworld that may not have shown themselves under other qualitative research conditions. Transformative phenomenology reminds us of the traditions and prejudices that we bring to our research and the multiple realities influencing our life worlds.

Dissertation: *Becoming a Leader: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Lifeworld of Nelson Mandela* (2014)

Lori Schneider, Ph. D.

It's typical to hear Fielding students and alumni describe their studies as transformational. I expected no less from my Fielding experience. Yet looking back today, ten years later, I am struck by how utterly life-changing my studies and dissertation process were and continue to be. Each time I have faced another new challenge—be it losing a spouse, finding a new love, or riding my bicycle across the state—I have been able to draw upon the insights, perspective, and strengths gleaned from my study and practice of phenomenology. I have learned to interpret and reinterpret my life in terms of my conscious experience and ongoing reflections upon those experiences. I have learned to be patient and to let the insights reveal themselves as they may, with the passage of time. Phenomenology is not merely transformational; it is conducive to further transformation.



Dissertation: *At Home in the Global Work Place: Remote Workers' Experience of Local Place in Global Corporations* (2009)

Luann Drolc Fortune, Ph.D.

Transformative Phenomenology has shaped my work as a scholar-practitioner, particularly through its cornerstone of embodiment. I first began my enlightenment under Valerie Bentz' expert guidance in 2007 as a beginning doctoral student at Fielding. Relevant to my practice experience, I needed to reach beyond didactic platforms about somatic experience to practical solutions for my applied research on body-based experience. I also sought legitimacy as I blended the somatically and intuitively based wisdom that I acquired through my practice into my scholarship. Transformative Phenomenology encouraged me to actively integrate practice-based techniques and helped me to legitimize my clinical knowledge base. In the process, I embraced the identity of scholar-practitioner-advocate and became transformed myself. Consequently, I suggest that a fifth foundational element is implicit in Transformative Phenomenology: an advocacy call for the topics and paths less traveled in scholarship.



Excerpts of this statement are also found in my paper, *Transformative Phenomenology: Implications for Embodied Interpretation*, Presented at the 5th Annual Meetings of the Interdisciplinary Coalition of North American Phenomenologists Ramapo College, Mahwah, NJ, May 26, 2013

Dissertation: How Do Seasoned Massage Therapists Accomplish a Whole Session with Established Clients? (2012)

Rosa Zubizarreta-Ada, M.A.

grateful for the invitation to
connect more deeply
with the texture of experience...
both a coming-home
and an opening
to in-dwelling mystery.

what changes
when we return to
less-mediated experience?

an ineffable sense of greater ease,
permeating everything...

a bit more clarity in the lens,
and the whole world appears more vividly.



Sergej van Middendorp, Ph.D.

The first thing that came to mind while reading the question for this reflection was that I never really joined the transformative phenomenology community as a student. Yet, from the start, I have immersed myself in the context, and the action that this community creates. Reading *Mindful Inquiry*, *Transformative Phenomenology*, attending workshops by Valerie



and David at session. And later, serving on the committees of Dan Maxwell and Ayumi Nishii helped me relate and learn about phenomenology. My own life practice included meditation and somatic exercises aimed at the integration of mind and body. Co-organizing and Joining the Krakow and Konstanz conferences brought me into this community for 'real'. In retrospect, I experience a double helix where I have co-evolved with this idea and this community, and where I have learned through the many and diverse relationships between the ideas and the actions we jointly perform.

Dissertation: *Embodying Metaphors in Systems* (2016)

Tetyana Azarova, M.A.

Trying to think about a phrase describing how Transformative Phenomenology affected my life, “enjoyment of wonderment” was the expression appearing in my awareness. Indeed, amidst a busy daily routine, focused on project managing my every step in a constant race towards goal achievement, I almost forgot what it means to genuinely experience a sense of wonder. My life felt as if it was drying up. I lost my sense of mystery, my joy of the moment. Intuitively I felt: Something has to change! Phenomenology opened for me a new way of knowing and being. I began listening to my intuition. I gave myself permission not to know in advance, not to rush and enjoy simply being present. Marveling at the ordinary, gradually I ran into unspeakable, into transcendent. Wandering in wonderment became my door to different realities.



Theresa Southam, M.A.

I hadn't expected to meet an indigenous elder whose life long dream it has been to be a PhD scholar, alumni who were doing meaningful work, recovering addicts who spoke eloquently of their knowledge, and jazz musicians playing interpretations of David Rehorick's work at *the Social Innovation and Transformative Phenomenology Conference*, in Surrey, British Columbia. My own presentation *Giving from Flow: Gerotranscendent Generativity A Phenomenological Perspective* took on new meaning in this setting, where communication relied not on words but on interpersonal connections of spirit. I experienced transcendence as I met the gaze of organizer Michael Wilson. I watched my peer Frank Rojas share early life experiences that would give him the strength and resolve to complete his studies. The transformative experience in Surrey led to an amendment to an IRB I had for existing research with older adults and a deeper reflection on my research question. This research received an Honorable Mention as a poster at Summer Session in Chicago, 2018. I am deeply indebted to the wise guidance of Dr. Valerie Bentz and Dr. David Rehorick.



Valerie Nishi, Ph.D.

I am a Fielding alumni and a scholar-practitioner in the field of Leadership and Organizational Development. My dissertation research focused on the impact of aesthetic factors on the experiences of participants in an executive development program.

The gift of exploring somatics and phenomenology with Valerie and David has enabled me to weave the richness of this method of inquiry and way of being into my life and work. This journey has unlocked the power of multiple ways of knowing through the mind, body and spirit and across disciplines and fields from the individual to the universal. I design and facilitate leadership development programs engaging the stories and lived experiences of participants using art and creative techniques - and often hear that something has fundamentally shifted in how they see the world and who they are. I have discovered that creating the space for curiosity, courage and deep connection –invites the creative soul, the collective heart and moral leadership. I believe that phenomenology provides a critical gateway to understand restore and transform humanity in the evolving complexity we are living into.



Dissertation: Living Essence: Exploring Aesthetic Factors in Leadership Development Experiences (2015)

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