Teacher-Student Relationships in Court-Mandated Adult Education: A Phenomenological Study

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While there is a considerable body of literature on adult correctional education, this literature almost exclusively deals with teachers and students working within incarceration settings, where students are in jail or prison. There is a lack of research on the experiences of teachers working with students who are a part of the correctional system but are placed within the community, i.e., community corrections. In this study the author examines the experiences of teachers working with court-mandated, community corrections students in GED/ABE programs. Seven adult education teachers share their experiences in this phenomenological study. The findings of the study indicate a special relationship, a chiasm, between teachers and students. Implications of this chiasm, an experience described by Merleau-Ponty, are explored. Keywords: Adult Education, Correctional Education, Community Corrections, Phenomenology, Relationship Chiasm

In this study the author examines the experiences of teachers working with court-mandated students in General Educational Development (GED) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. While there is no reliable data on the number of students in court-mandated education programs, there were 5.1 million individuals in community corrections programs (probation and parole) in 2009 (Pew Center on the States). While this number dropped, for the first time since 1980, during 2009 to 5.02 million (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010), it is up from 4.6 million in 2000 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). Part of this increase in the number of community corrections clients comes from states realizing that probation and parole are more cost effective than incarceration (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Data from 2003 indicates that, at that time, 30.6% of probationers did not have a high school diploma or GED diploma, compared to 18% of the general population (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). If that number has relatively remained unchanged, the some 1.6 million individuals in community corrections programs do not have a high school diploma or GED diploma and are potential students for adult educators working in community education programs.

While there is a considerable body of literature on adult correctional education, this literature almost exclusively deals with teachers and students working within incarceration settings, where students are in jail or prison. There is a lack of research on the experiences of teachers working with students who are in community corrections programs such as probation and parole. Empirical findings are, therefore, unavailable to guide theoretical conceptualization, instructional practice, program design or policy. While there may cursorily appear to be no difference between these two populations (those who are incarcerated and those in community corrections), it has been suggested that a substantial difference exists between them in the amount of time they have for activities such as education (Mottern, 2011). With states seeing a correlation between a reduction in criminal recidivism and attainment of the GED diploma (Anderson, 1995; Brewster & Sharp, 2002; Case, 2006; Steurer & Smith, 2003), community corrections clients are being mandated by the courts to attend educational classes. By mandating community corrections clients to become students,

states are directly increasing the number of students to be served by adult educators in community programs.

As these pressures make GED attainment a priority, adult educators within the community will likely see an increase in the number of students in their classrooms who are court-mandated to attend classes. The current literature is silent on what teachers may expect when working with these students. This research looks at the experiences of teachers who are already working with this special population and what others may expect.

This study is designed to begin filling a void in the research literature on the experience of GED/ABE teachers working with adult students in community corrections programs who are mandated to attend education programs. While some research has been undertaken regarding students' experiences with education while incarcerated (Batchelder & Rachal, 2000; Boshier, 1983; Clements & McKee, 2000; Gee, 2006; Mageehon, 2003; Moeller, Day, & Rivera, 2004; Montross & Montross, 1997; Parsons & Langenbach, 1993; Rose, 2004; Schlesinger, 2005) and with teachers' experiences working with incarcerated students (Adams, 1970; Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005; Fox, 1991; Kratcoski, 1982; Mearns, 1997; Wright, 2005), there is no outstanding research on teachers' experiences working with students in community corrections programs who are mandated to attend educational classes. Empirical findings are, therefore, unavailable to guide instructional practice in this area.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of GED/ABE teachers who work with adult students in community corrections programs who are mandated to attend educational classes. This means that the students have been referred to educational classes through the process of therapeutic jurisprudence and are living in a community setting. Students are not incarcerated. The specific research question addressed in this study is about the experience of GED/ABE teachers working with court-mandated students. The phenomenon under consideration is the teachers' experiences working with this special population who are attending classes under a mandate from corrections, and this question directly asks teachers about that experience. The research question is, "What is the experience of GED/ABE teachers working with court-mandated students in community corrections programs?"

Rationale for the Method of the Study

As evidenced by the general lack of studies on the subject of teachers' experiences in the area of community corrections, research on this topic is warranted in order to fill that gap in the literature. The gap in literature on community corrections populations that does not exist in literature on incarcerated populations may exist for several reasons. Research in prisons deals with, literally, captive populations that are relatively stable. While prisoners may move between various housing units, they are still contained within the prison itself, and their locations are tracked and known at all times. In community corrections, a researcher does not usually know where participants are at any given time. Participants in community corrections programs may miss an interview appointment, and researchers may receive no notice that the participant will not attend or why the appointment was missed and may then have to try and reschedule the interview. Prison inmates receive the benefit of getting to spend time out of their pod (housing unit), a privilege in incarcerated settings that offers a benefit for prisoners. Participants from the community must take time out of their normal schedule to meet with researchers. This may be seen as a burden, even though participants

initially volunteer for the research. Given the relative ease of interviewing participants in prisons and the obstacles, that may be encountered when interviewing community corrections participants, researchers may choose the convenience of research in a prison setting rather than the troubles that can be encountered in community settings.

Phenomenology was chosen as a method for this research study because phenomenology is about the study of essence through lived experience, and teachers' experiences are the focus of this research. The existential hermeneutic phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty was chosen because that this method helps us come closest to understanding lived experience and essence. This lived experience is formed by our acting upon the world and being acted upon by the world, an experience dealt with by Merleau-Ponty in his ideas about chiasm. The research method used by Thomas and Pollio (2002) at the University of Tennessee is based in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and, therefore, presents itself as an appropriate method for pursuing the study of existential hermeneutic phenomenology.

Potential Contributions of the Study

This research can add to the understanding of the field of adult education in several ways: as a contribution to the literature about adult education teachers' experiences working with correctional students in community corrections educational programs; as a phenomenological study in correctional adult education; and as an aspect of teachers' professional development with regard to working with adult correctional students.

The professional development aspect is especially relevant. Teachers typically encounter this population with little or no preparation for working with adult students in community corrections programs when students are mandated to attend educational classes. If we can understand what it is like for teachers who work with this population – what their experience is working with these students – then we can help teachers be better prepared to engage students in meaningful learning. This study can contribute to the professional development literature and prepare teachers to work with this unique population, thus leading to more effective teaching practices with this population of students.

Literature Review

This study is designed to begin filling a void in the research literature on the experience of GED/ABE teachers working with adult students in community corrections programs who are mandated to attend education programs. Some research has been undertaken regarding students' experiences with education while incarcerated (Batchelder & Rachal, 2000; Boshier, 1983; Flowers, 2000; Gee, 2006; Mageehon, 2003; Moeller, Day, & Rivera, 2004; Montross & Montross, 1997; Parsons & Langenbach, 1993; Rose, 2004; Schlesinger, 2005). While a significant difference between incarcerated students and students within the community is assumed, the research with incarcerated students suggests student-teacher interactions are an important aspect of the educational experience.

Batchelder and Rachal (2000) compared the effects of computer-assisted instruction (CAI) with traditional instruction, alone, in an experimental design with inmates in prison education program. Seventy-one inmates were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. Results indicated that scores for those students in the experimental group were not significantly higher than those who received traditional instruction alone. The findings confirmed results from similar tests using CAI. The lack of teacher support was seen as a significant disadvantage to students during CAI treatment time. "Second only to learner motivation, teacher enthusiasm may be the single most important aspect of an effective CAI program" (Batchelder & Rachal, 2000, p. 132).

Boshier (1983) analyzed the motives of inmates who participated in prison educational programs. Motivational variables were grouped in the areas of personal control, self-assertion, outside contact, self-preservation, and cognitive interest. Students had higher mean scores on personal control and cognitive interest than on other variables. The correlation matrix revealed that conservatism and having a relative noted on an inmate's file were the most significant variables associated with personal control scores.

Gee (2006) used an action research design to examine inmates' educational needs versus opportunities for education in a rural county GED program. Data from the survey was grouped into the domains of perceived inmate need, attitude toward current opportunity, motivational characteristics, and comments on recidivism. Motivational characteristics were broken down into cognitive control, goal orientation, activity orientation, and avoidance posture. Data analysis confirmed expectations that goal orientation was a key factor in motivation. Findings also showed that while students saw educational programming in a positive light, they desired more programs and more time in the programs. Student requested needs from teachers included more one-on-one instruction and more personal connection.

Mageehon (2003) interviewed five women inmates using ten open-ended questions. Three themes emerged from the data: the women had positive educational experiences in their early school years which were often the result of relationships with compassionate teachers (teachers perceived as uncaring and unconcerned influenced their decisions to drop out of school); the women had traumatic events occur in their lives that prevented them from completing their schooling at the time; and, the women were "highly tuned in" (p. 195) to teachers' perceptions of them and "were particularly attentive to the level of compassion and patience shown to them by the GED teacher" (p. 195).

Moeller, Day, and Rivera (2004) randomly selected 16 male inmates from educational programs at a state correctional institution to participate in a study concerning students' perceptions of their correctional education and the educational environment within the institution. A self-administered questionnaire containing both open- and closed-ended questions was used to assess students' perceptions. Open-ended questions about the classroom environment indicated that students comfort within the classroom was because of the instructor and the helpful relationship with the instructor. Open-ended questions about educational motivation revealed teachers were among the motivating factors for seven of the 16 students listed. Help from the teacher was most often listed as what all students liked most about their classes.

While there are some studies on teachers' experiences working with incarcerated students (Corcoran, 1985; Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005; Fox, 1991; Kratcoski, 1982; McKee, & Clements 2000; Mearns, 1997; Wright, 2004, 2005), there is no outstanding research on teachers' experiences working with students in community corrections programs who are mandated to attend educational classes. The studies done with teachers working with incarcerated students give some indication of the importance of the teacher-student relationship.

Corcoran's (1985) essay on teaching in maximum security institutions points out that "the personality of instructors, particularly their ability to earn the respect of prisoners, is crucial. Successful prison courses depend on the ability of instructors to motivate learners in far from pleasant learning conditions" (p. 55). This ability to motivate is intimately tied to the relationship created between teachers and students within the institutional classroom.

Edwards-Wiley and Chivers (2005) used two studies to examine the perceptions of instructors teaching in prison educational programs concerning the ability of students to succeed in college level courses. Findings in both studies indicated that instructors viewed incarcerated students as equal in academic ability to college students attending on-campus courses. Instructors also evaluated incarcerated students as putting forth more effort in their

classes than traditional college students. Both groups of participants also agreed that incarcerated students were engaged in prison educational due to a sincere desire to receive an education and to impress correctional and court officials.

Fox (1991) conducted open-ended interviews with ten correctional educators concerning adult education practices. Only two of the ten participants had formally studied adult education. Minimal adult education practices were used by the participants. Those principles that were used included creation of a conducive learning environment and sharing responsibility for the learning process.

Kratcoski (1982) conducted a survey of correctional education volunteers' motives and characteristics with a sample size of 545 volunteers, representing 36 different programs. Findings indicated a strong motivation among the volunteers to help others.

McKee and Clements (2000) proposed 14 challenges faced by correctional instructors in implementing individualized instruction. The challenges identified are not restricted to instruction within correctional institutions and may be faced by teachers working with court-mandated students in community settings. Among the challenges identified are creating independent learners through motivation, supervision and evaluation, and developing a positive and reinforcing educational environment, especially through the use of positive reinforcement of student success.

Wright (2004) conducted a phenomenological study of caring as a part of teaching in correctional settings. Seven participants indicated that "care warms the relationship between teachers and students and this relationship makes learning possible" (p. 195) and "care is at the heart of teaching; it warms the school and makes learning possible" (p. 197). The significance of caring relations as essential for learning to occur in correctional institutions and with correctional students is reiterated throughout the study.

Method

I will provide a general history of phenomenological (philosophical) inquiry and how phenomenology directly relates to the study of adult education before proceeding to look at a methodology based in existential hermeneutic phenomenology. This general history is included in the methodology section because the research method must correspond with the philosophy if the study is to exhibit logical structure. As the history is examined, the reason for using existential hermeneutic phenomenology for this research will become apparent. The descriptive (eidetic) phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology of Martin Heidegger will be discussed, as will the existential hermeneutic phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Existentialist and phenomenological approaches to education will be examined, as will the ways in which phenomenology may be used as a philosophical basis for the study of adult education. The phenomenological methodology of Thomas and Pollio (2002), as used at the University of Tennessee, will then be examined as a legitimate way of doing phenomenological research in adult education.

A Brief History of Phenomenology

Phenomenology is often seen as both a philosophy and a qualitative research method (Dowling, 2007). As a philosophy, it is "a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning" (van Manen, 2007, p. 12). As a research method, it is "the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience" (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 6). Creswell (2009) stated that "phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a

phenomenon as described by participants. Understanding the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method" (p. 13). Minichiello and Kottler (2010) argued that the aim of phenomenology "is to understand the meaning that people attach to their experiences, but the focus is to investigate the internal world as it is seen, felt, intuited, and thought by the individual" (p. 25). Grbich (2007) defined phenomenology as "an approach which attempts to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these" (p. 84).

Phenomenology as both a philosophy and a research method in adult education has only recently begun to be explored. This is interesting because disciplines overlapping adult education (including the broad topic of education itself and its relationship to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism) have used phenomenology as both a philosophical base and a methodological approach to examine issues within their disciplines for a longer period.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) took a phenomenological approach to sociology in *The Social Construction of Knowledge*, while phenomenological studies in psychology were well underway by the early 1970's at Duquesne University (Giorgi, Fischer, & von Eckhartsberg, 1971). While Collins (1984) considered philosophically how phenomenology may be used in future adult education research, other disciplines were forging ahead using phenomenological methods. The first book to solely address phenomenology and adult education, *Adult Education and Phenomenological Research* (Stanage, 1987), did not come to press until almost over a decade and a half after the first volume of Duquesne studies was published.

In a very few short decades, phenomenology has moved from a relatively obscure philosophy in adult education to a well-used research method. The move has been so successful that a lack of differentiation between philosophy and practice has led some to claim a philosophical orientation that is not supported in the methodology. Methodology is understood in the following manner: "a methodology is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter" (Laverty, 2003, p. 16). This practice of using a phenomenological methodology that is divorced from an appropriate philosophical backing has caused some concern within the phenomenological community (Caelli, 2001; Giorgi, 2008).

Descriptive Phenomenology

Popularized by Edmund Husserl (1901/2001), and influenced by Franz Brentano's (1874/1995) ideas of intentionality, phenomenology opposed the positivist idea that natural science was the sole arbiter of truth (Willis, 2001), especially when attempting to study human sciences using naturalistic methods (Laverty, 2003). Truth, according to Husserl, may be found in the shared, lived experiences of others. These shared experiences are the essence (*eidos*) of the experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004) and are the object of Husserl's (1901/2001) admonition to get "back to the things themselves (züchen zu den Sachen selbst)" (p. 2). In order rid oneself of subjectivity so that the eidetic structure could be seen, Husserl proposed the need for a reduction whereby a transcendental state of objectivity is achieved and the eidae (essences) may be known and described (LeVasseur, 2003). Husserl's method consisted of three parts, based in his philosophy:

> (a) One assumes the transcendental phenomenological attitude, (b) one brings
> to consciousness an instance of the phenomenon to be explored, whether actual
> or fictional, and with the help of free imaginative variation, one intuits the

essence of the phenomenon being investigated, and (c) one carefully describes the essence that has been discovered. (Giorgi, 2007, p. 64)

Seminal to this process is the *epoché*, or bracketing procedure, whereby one suspends or holds in abeyance one's preformed suppositions about the topic of study (LeVasseur, 2003). Through this process of eidetic (transcendental phenomenological) reduction, we may know the life-world (*Lebenswelt*), the pre-reflective lived experience (Dowling, 2007), and get back to the things themselves and come to knowledge of the truth. Because of the descriptive nature of Husserl's phenomenology, it became known as descriptive phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

It is important to note that descriptive phenomenology assumes an objective truth actually exists. Husserl chose a path different from the standard scientific method to come to the knowledge of that truth, but the goal of study was the same (i.e., to describe objective truth). This truth was the eidae of human experiences that existed in the pre-reflective Lebenswelt of individual experiences. This is the reason that descriptive phenomenological findings are just as generalizable as findings obtained from standard scientific methods.

This is mentioned because phenomenological studies often fail to claim generalizability. This indicates a misunderstanding about the nature of phenomenological research. And it is in this concept of generalizability that the reduction presents itself as the defining aspect of phenomenological methodology, whether it is descriptive, interpretive, or existential. As Solomon (1972) succinctly points out, "the phenomenological reduction… guarantees that we see essences and not just individuals" (p. 22). Giorgi (2008) explained the concept of generalization in phenomenology:

> So long as one can employ the eidetic reduction, with the help of imaginative variation, one can obtain an eidetic intuition into the state of affairs and describe an essential finding that is intrinsically general. Husserl makes it clear that one can do that. I may observe a specific chair. But nothing prevents me from switching attitudes and taking a more general perspective toward the particular chair and seeing it as a cultural object designed to support the human body in the posture of sitting. The more general description is as true as the particular details of the chair that is taken as an example of a particular perception. There is no way to prevent one from assuming such a more general perspective. The switch results in eidetic findings that are intrinsically general. ("The Question of Generalization," para. 1)

Imaginative variation (also, free imaginative variation) is a process whereby "one freely changes aspects or parts of a phenomenon or object, and one sees if the phenomenon remains identifiable with the part changed or not" (Giorgi, 1997, pp. 242-243). Van Manen (1979) described it as "the method of probing the distinctive or essential features of… phenomena" (p. 10). When the Chinese Taoist sage, Chuang Tzu (389-286 BCE), said, "I dreamed I was a butterfly, flitting around in the sky; then I awoke. Now I wonder: Am I a man who dreamt of being a butterfly, or am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a man?" ("Chuang Tzu Quotes," 2010), he was engaging in free imaginative variation.

Thomas and Pollio (2002) also explained the concept of generalizability in existential hermeneutic phenomenology:

> The case for what might be called *phenomenological generalizability* is different [from that used in quantitative methods]. Here, "proof" does not depend solely on purity of method but also upon the *reader* of the research

report. In this case, when and if a description rings true, each specific reader who derives insight from the results of a phenomenological study may be thought to extend its generalizability. Unlike other research methods where the researcher establishes generalizability on the basis of statistical and experimental procedures, phenomenological research is "validated" by its readers. (p. 42)

However, Giorgi (2008) noted, "if one does not employ the eidetic reduction and arrive at an essence or some other type of eidetic invariant concerning the concrete, detailed description of an experienced phenomenon by one or several participants, proper phenomenological procedures have not been followed" ("The Question of Generalization," para. 3).

It must be remembered that phenomenology can be done with a single participant, and various participants are used simply to account for possible variations (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Polkinghorne (1989) spoke about this:

Husserl (1913/1931) held that knowledge of the structures of consciousness was not a matter of induction or generalization from a sample but was the result of a "direct grasp" of "eidetic seeing." I need only one instance (even an imaginary one) to grasp or "see" (not in the sense of visual sighting but of apprehending) the principle and inner necessities of a structure. (p. 42)

Polkinghorne's comment that the eidae may be imaginary highlights the reality of the essence in the consciousness, rather than in concrete existence. As Le Vesseur (2003) stated, "the eidos, say, of a horse and that of a unicorn are on par as eidae, even though horses exist and unicorns do not" (p. 412).

Simply, phenomenological research neither seeks an individual's thoughts on a subject nor the thoughts of a group of people on a subject, as such. If it did, then understanding would be contained within the individual, and generalizability would only be within that particular group. Phenomenology seeks eidae, the essences of experience, that are a part of the pre-reflective life-world of the participants. Essences are not tied to an individual or group but are universal, and therefore generalizable.

It is also important to remember that the life-world is pre-reflective. This pre-reflective state allows access to eidae. While I do not want to begin a discussion about possible comparisons between eidae and archetypes and the pre-reflective life-world and the subconscious, suffice it to say that these are fertile grounds for discussion, and psychotherapy has used phenomenology as a lens for therapeutic study for some time (Halling & Dearborn Nill, 1995; Jung, 1951/1972; Spiegelberg, 1975).

If I may simply use an analogy, if I dream about snakes, those snakes have a pre-reflective or subconscious significance that appears throughout human culture and identifies them as archetypes, "definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere" (Jung, 1936/1968, p. 42), or "an accepted cultural expression of an instinct through thousands of years of repeated use" (Laughlin, 1982, p. 76). Your personal experience with and interpretation of what the snakes mean to you may have little relevance to me (outside of a therapeutic relationship). It is the essence of the snakes that are of concern to me, and this essence is generalizable as an archetype within the collective unconscious, "a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition" (Jung, 1936/1968, p. 42). Likewise, eidae exist in the pre-reflective Lebenswelt and are, therefore, distinguished from personal experiences. Their

existence in the pre-reflective world as a non-personal essence, rather than the personal experience in a personal world, makes them generalizable.

If I may be allowed one more indulgence, Figure 1 shows the centripetal spiraling movement from the general (from the previous examples, either the Lebenswelt or the collective unconscious) that inductively coalesces into the singular (either an eidos or an archetype), and having been reduced either to essence or to instinctual symbol, may then spiral outward in a centrifugal fashion to be generalizable to a wider population. This illustration shall be used one more time in the explanation of interpretive phenomenology.
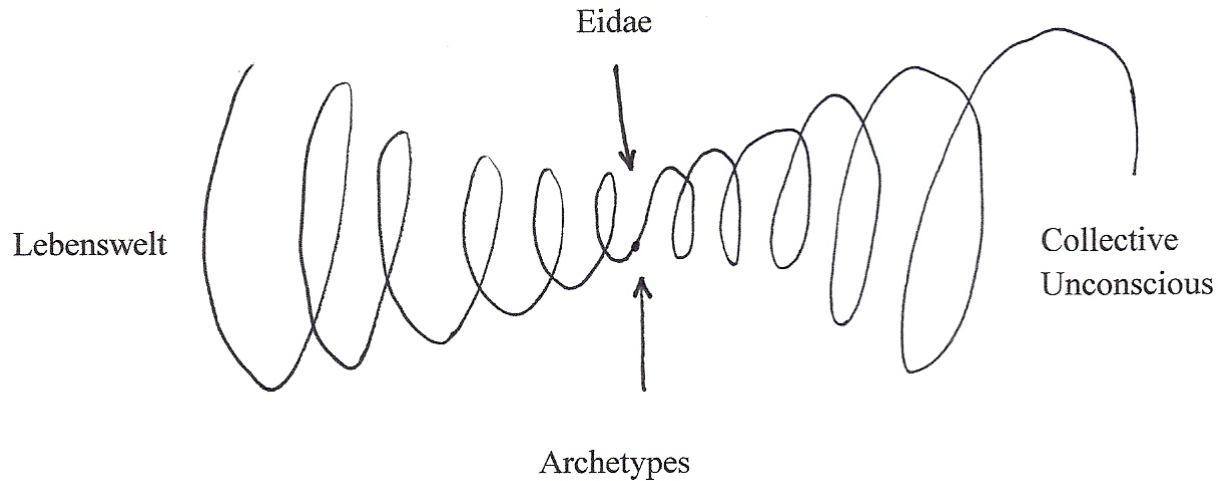

Figure 1. **The Spiral of Generalizability**

To close the present discussion about generalizability, it must be realized that if one argues against generalizability in phenomenology then one is arguing against phenomenological philosophy. Philosophically, generalizability is inherent in phenomenology. If one does not agree with the philosophy of phenomenology, then one must make an argument against the logical bases that constitute phenomenology as a philosophy. However, this is separate from an argument against generalizability in methodology. If one wants to argue against generalizability in phenomenological methodology, then one must either reject the philosophy (with appropriate attention to philosophical rebuttal, as stated above) or accept the philosophy and then argue that the method somehow fails to achieve what is promised by the philosophy.

It has been my experience that most statements denying generalizability in phenomenology are methodological arguments that do not first define a philosophical stance that opposes phenomenological thought. Such arguments are not supported by an appropriate logical base and are, therefore, spurious. Although these arguments are often made in quantitative research, qualitative research also fails to make appropriate foundational statements when rejecting generalizability, as evident in Giorgi's (2008) article. In the absence of solid arguments against generalizability, the firm argument for it, based in phenomenological philosophy, is adequate to support the method which rises from it.

Interpretive Phenomenology

And all I saw from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood.
Over these things I could not see:
These were the things that bounded me.
(Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Renascence," 1912)

Opposing Husserl's ideas that subjectivity can be bracketed out when examining lived experience, Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) posited that objectivity cannot be achieved because we always come to the essential experience and awareness of Being (*Dasein*) through being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-Sein*) (Laverty, 2003). For Heidegger, the researcher is a part of the research, and we cannot interpret without judgment: "'Understanding is never without presuppositions. We do not, and cannot, understand anything from a purely objective position. We always understand from within the context of our disposition and involvement in the world'" (Johnson, 2000, p. 23, in McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009b, "The development of Heideggerian Phenomenology," para. 3). Like the person in the lines from the Millay's (1912) poem, "Renascence," above, we are all "bounded" by our being-in-the-world, and over those things, we cannot see.

Heidegger, who was more concerned with the ontological concept of being than Husserl's epistemological concerns about knowing (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009a), suggested that truth may be known through hermeneutics and the interpretation of what it means "to be." Merleau-Ponty (in Thomas & Pollio, 2002) pointed out that hermeneutic phenomenology has as its aim "to describe human experience on its own terms and not in terms of theoretical principles" (p. 13). This ontological distinction altered the methodological approach of applied phenomenology by pushing interpretation, rather than description, of the phenomenon under study to the fore.

A necessary condition for interpretation is being self-reflective (Laverty, 2003) and Dilthey (in Todres & Wheeler, 2001) stressed the importance of reflexivity and examination of one's positionality in interpretation. It will be noted, however, that this self-reflection is a part of the hermeneutic method itself, and it is through this hermeneutical methodology that truth (for Heidegger, the truth of what it means "to be") is sought. Heidegger sought the essential truth of being, believing that such truth actually existed and could be known through phenomenological methodology. He developed hermeneutics as a way to advance clarification of the conditions under which understanding occurs in ontology (Dowling, 2004). Because complete objectivity cannot be achieved, hermeneutics is used to perform what is the eidetic reduction in descriptive phenomenology. As Laverty (2003) pointed out, "for a hermeneutic phenomenological project, the multiple stages of interpretation that allow patterns to emerge, the discussion of how interpretations arise from the data, and the interpretive process itself are seen as critical" (p. 23) to the rigor of the methodology. Heidegger believed that "being is always the being of a being, and accordingly, it becomes accessible only indirectly through some existing entity" (Korab-Karpowicz, 2009). This necessitated the methodological use of the phenomenological reduction. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) observed, "Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world' appears only against the background of the phenomenological reduction" (p. xvi).

This was typical of the Heidegger of *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927), who saw phenomenology as the method of doing ontology, and whose views after "the Turn" (*die Kehre*) in his thinking were different from those during this period. While this paper intends to take that distinction no further, it is acknowledged that Heidegger moved from the central question of being in this early period to the question of the truth of being in later writings (Korab-Karpowics, 2009), from a strictly ontological stance to a position influenced by the existential thought of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Westphal, 1997).

I would now like to recall the spiral in Figure 1 and turn the longitudinal structure on its end, so that we are looking down upon the coil. In hermeneutics, one moves from the whole to the part to the whole again, and if we imagine that happening with our spiral, we begin to have the effect of a hypnotist's disk, Figure 2. As we look at the disk, it seems that the disk turns in one direction – from large to small – but as we continue to look at it, it

appears to rotate in another – from small to large – in a continuous flux. This simple illusion of the hypnotist's disk illustrates the interpretive hermeneutic method as movement proceeds from general to specific to general, once again. It is the same spiral we used in Figure 1 to illustrate the eidetic reduction, only it is now set on its end and used to illustrate the hermeneutic method. This change in the position of the spiral (if I may press my luck with one more analogy) is what Heidegger did with phenomenology. He took the eidetic reduction and turned it on end, using hermeneutics as a phenomenological tool to achieve, essentially the same function (i.e., to reduce experience to essence).

From the part to the whole

From the whole to the part

Figure 2. **The Hypnodisk of Hermeneutics**

Existential Phenomenology.

Existentialism is a philosophy that addresses the questions of being, of living an authentic life, and how to do so with both freedom and responsibility (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Existentialist thought, via Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Nietzsche, influenced the later thinking of Heidegger as he pondered the seminal existential question of what it means "to be." This seems a logical progression in his ontological studies since existentialism is primarily concerned with the questions of not only what it means to be (as stated above), but whether we are capable of being in the world and the significance we make of our being in the world (Lieberman, 1985).

Existentialist thought begins with Søren Kierkegaard, and Ricoeur (1967) said that Kierkegaard "is at the origin of existential phenomenology" (p. 207), implying that existentialism and phenomenology share common concepts. Estes (1970) has suggested that Kierkegaard's existentialism shares with Husserlian phenomenology the conceptual criteria of intentionality ("the mutual implications of man and the other," p. 155), intersubjectivity (interhuman relationship and interhuman communication) and openness ("the possible ways in which man experiences or intends the other," p. 155). "For Merleau-Ponty, as for Husserl before him," Thomas and Pollio (2002), "intentionality captures the fundamental structure of human experience and reveals an essential interconnectedness between us and the world" (p. 14). This intentionality that makes figural the interconnectedness between person and world is grounded in perception, the most important aspect of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Apart from philosophical similarities that may create an association between existentialism and phenomenology, existentialism adopted the phenomenological method as a logical way in which to do its investigations. Spiegelberg (1960) stated that "once

existentialism comes to grips with the epistemological problem… it has little hope of support from the more empirical and positivist philosophies or psychologies. Its best chance is an approach which stresses and develops the faithful description of the phenomena as they present themselves [i.e., phenomenology]" (p. 70).

Merleau-Ponty bridged the gap between Husserl's proposed transcendental objectivity and Heidegger's hermeneutic emphasis with his existential hermeneutic phenomenology. "The most important lesson the reduction teaches us," stated Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), "is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (p. xv). Epoché does not create objectivity because we are always being-in-the-world (*être au monde*). It does, however, allow us to reflect on our experiences and the thinking about those experiences to become more obvious and as a result to set aside or bracket our assumptions and paradigms to examine the phenomenon under consideration. While Merleau-Ponty did not accept Husserl's idea of the necessity of a transcendental state, he did accept the usefulness of the method and claim consistency between existentialism and the phenomenological method (Smith, 2005). This consistency derives from Merleau-Ponty's belief in three separate worlds: the pre-reflective Lebenswelt, the pre-objective world of lived experience, and the world of science (Dreyfus & Todes, 1962; Smith, 2005).

Merleau-Ponty rejected the Cartesian dualism that posited both a distinction between body and mind and asserted the preeminence of the mind over the body. For Merleau-Ponty, experience was embodied, that is, the world is experienced and understood by and through the body (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Body, along with time, others ,and world, compose the four existential grounds against which all lived experience becomes figural. This concept of figure and ground, and one's experience of them, is based in gestalt psychology. The concept is often represented by the Rubin vase, where one may see either two white faces as figural on a black ground, or a black vase as figural on a white ground. The colors themselves are meaningless, but what we bring to the seeing of them determines the patterns that we perceive, depending on what we see as figural. Figures become divining rods, pointing to wellsprings of meaning.

Merleau-Ponty has often been criticized for his use of gestalt psychology in his phenomenology, but one must remember that for Merleau-Ponty investigation occurred in the tripartite world view described above. He saw nothing inherently amiss with using science (and psychology). As we may experience gestalt from seemingly meaningless patterns, we understand essence from what may be seemingly meaningless life experiences. Just as the figure of the black vase becomes apparent when we understand the gestalt of the picture, essence becomes apparent when we understand the gestalt of lived experience.

At any rate, science was not the prime means of knowing the world for Merleau-Ponty. "Science manipulates things," he stated (1964a), "and gives up living in them" (p. 1). Phenomenological intentionality was, he posited, how interconnectedness with the world was experienced. The Rubin vase is an example of gestalt and its relationship to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and serves as an illustration of how figure and ground relate to lived experience and how gestalt concepts may be incorporated into phenomenology. Figure and ground, necessary for gestalt to occur, help us find essence in phenomenological investigation.

It will also be noted that Merleau-Ponty was continuously revising his understanding (Grene, 1976; Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968), and notes from prior to his death indicate that this was true up until his sudden demise in 1961. As in the case of his predecessors, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology appears to have changed as his own experience with phenomena changed. This is consistent with his philosophy, and anything less would have proved Merleau-Ponty to have been non-genuine, one who manipulated ideas but ceased to live them.

The study of phenomenology continued, and Spiegelberg was one of its most visible proponents. His *Doing Phenomenology: Essays On and In Phenomenology* (1975), is a classic. Ricoeur (1967), also, carried the phenomenological flame, and although it may have been dimmed by the propensity in educational research to justify itself through empirical scientific methodology, the phenomenological light continued to grow brighter.

Existentialism and Phenomenology in Education

Existentialism and Education

Existentialist thought has also addressed education, although perhaps one of the names most synonymous with existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre, addressed the subject of education only a little. Nietzsche's thoughts on existentialism and (German) education envisioned educational institutions imbuing a select few individuals with a curriculum of German culture, producing geniuses who would create or re-create the "'pure reflection of the eternal and immutable essence of things'" (as cited in Baker, 1966, p. 218). This emphasis on education being the vehicle of culture was also evident in José Ortega y Gasset's (1944/2009) *Mission of the University*, although Ortega considered the university to be the place of education for the common man, and not Nietzsche's genius elite, and culture to be the ideas of a particular age by which that particular age exists, rather than one set of ideas that fit all ages.

According to Ortega, the university has three functions: transmitting culture, teaching professions and scientific research, and the training of new scientists (Baker, 1966). For Ortega, these represented a hierarchy, with enculturation being pre-eminent and separate from research. Karl Jaspers, in his *The Idea of the University* (1959), saw the university as a community of scholars who seek the truth, and his concept of the university as a cultural center, professional school, and research institute, are quite similar to Ortega's, although unlike Ortega, Jaspers did not see these as constituting a hierarchy. Also, Jasper's university was primarily a place to seek truth rather than educate the common man, and Jaspers, unlike Ortega, saw research as connected to teaching and not opposed to it (Baker, 1966).

Jaspers differed from Nietzsche in that he saw the university as a place of complete freedom, where students and scholars pursued truth without being hampered by rules and regulations. As schools increasingly become the de facto systems of transmission for not only cultural, professional and scientific knowledge, but also for moral knowledge, students should be free to experience life itself, not protected from it; otherwise, they may never come to grips with the existential questions of being.

While Jaspers, Nietzsche, and Ortega contributed to existentialist thought about education, existentialist philosopher Martin Buber has been held up as one of the only existentialists to actually develop a philosophy of education (and adult education) within existentialism, using his I-Thou concept to describe the inclusive relationship between the teacher and the student, an authentic relationship between one human being and another (Baker, 1966). This idea of relational education was echoed by Marcel (1952) in *Men against Humanity*, when he stated that "'what is educatable is [not the masses, but] only an individual, or more exactly, a person'" (as cited in Niblett, 1954, p. 106).

Phenomenology and Education

Phenomenological pedagogy came to the fore in the 1950's with recognition of the Utrecht School, a body of work created by individual scholars such as Langeveld, Buytendijk, Rümke, Beets, Van Lennep, Bijl, Van den Berg, Linschoten, Kouwer, Vermeer, and Van der Zeyde (Van Manen, 1978-1979). Langeveld, the founder of the Institute for Didactic and

Pedagogic Studies at the University of Utrecht, often noted that phenomenology, after Husserl, was divided into philosophy and method. Lengeveld (in Van Manen, 1978-1979) considered his contributions to be methodological in nature, rather than philosophical, and his goal was "not to contribute to a transcendental or philosophical phenomenology but rather to develop a pedagogy which is grounded in phenomenological method" (p. 49). One of the prime assumptions associated with this phenomenological pedagogy is "the process of inquiry and theory-building by which assumptions regarding the concept of man, the nature of learning, and views of knowledge are constantly pushed up front, where they can be reflectively explicated" (Van Manen, 1978-1979, p. 49), and "phenomenological descriptions always are constructed within the integrity of what it means to educate" (Van Manen, 1978-1979, p. 50). This phenomenological pedagogy contained existential phenomenological assumptions, such as the notion that a developing child constructs his or her own "life-project" through "dynamic self-interpretation" (Van Manen, 1978-1979, p. 50). The basis of the Utrecht School rested on the idea that "true pedagogy involves assisting the child in coming to terms with, and transcending, the very constraints (constraints which make a behavioral pedagogy possible) that would stand in the way of a reflective and autonomous passage toward responsible adulthood" (Van Manen, 1978-1979, p. 50).

Van Manen himself is a disciple of the Utrecht School, and his writings on phenomenology in education are extensive. In his article on "The Phenomenology of Pedagogic Observation" (1979), Van Manen pointed out that a true educator demonstrates practical competence in the manner of her ability to create an educational situation from any situation and that the language of education is the language of philosophy and dialectical phenomenology, rather than positivistic science – as is so often the case in North American classrooms. He cited Beets: "'Pedagogic thought,' says Beets, 'is not equivalent to the kind of thinking which occurs in the empirical sciences. But since it describes, analyzes, clarifies, corrects and provides direction to concrete situations, pedagogical thinking is closely related to existential philosophy'" (as cited in Van Manen, 1979, p. 6). True pedagogy, true education, from this existential phenomenological place, is an invitation toward emancipation, rather than a command to conform to the dictates of authority.

Van Manen's writings make it very clear that phenomenological education is very different from the education observed in most North American classrooms. Although constructivist ideas may influence educational practices, few, if any, North American classrooms provide an invitation to emancipation through examination of existential phenomenological assumptions. However, phenomenology in the practice of adult education has slowly been advancing.

The following phenomenological method is that suggested by Thomas and Pollio (2002) and used in the phenomenology research group at the University of Tennessee. While it is not the only phenomenological method, it is a method of doing existential hermeneutic phenomenology and the method used in this study. The flow chart (Figure 3) shows the method for doing existential phenomenology based in dialogic research as utilized in the research group.

This method has been used in adult educational research at the university (Anderson, 2008; Anderson, Taylor, & Ziegler, 2007; Donaghy, 2005; Frye, 2007; Frye, Curran, Pierce, Young, & Ziegler, 2005), showing its potential value and relationship to adult education. It has also been used in research in community corrections adult education (Davis, Mottern, & Ziegler, 2010), showing its value to this area of study.
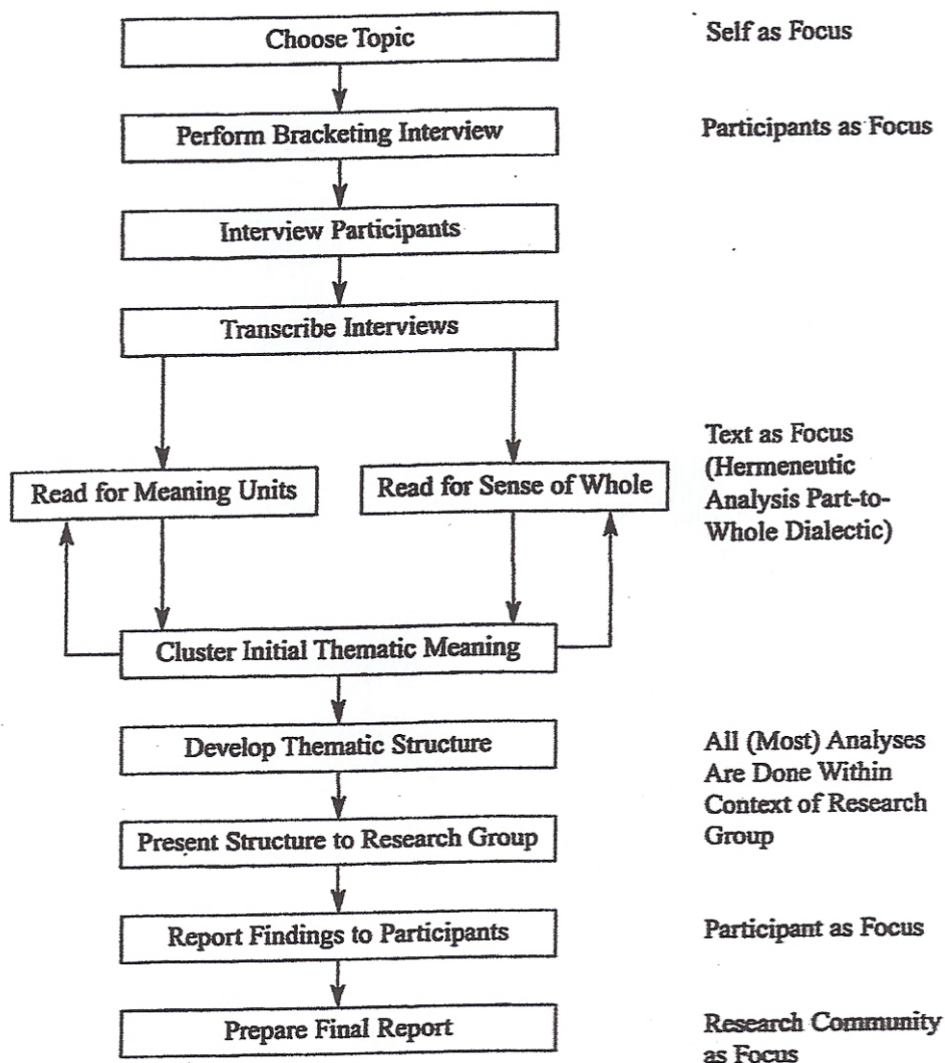
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│      Choose Topic       │                    Self as Focus
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            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Perform Bracketing Interview │               Participants as Focus
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│  Interview Participants  │
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Transcribe Interviews  │
└─────────────────────────┘
      │             │
      ▼             ▼
┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────────┐        Text as Focus
│ Read for     │ │ Read for Sense   │        (Hermeneutic
│ Meaning Units│ │ of Whole         │        Analysis Part-to-
└──────────────┘ └──────────────────┘        Whole Dialectic)
      │    ▲         │    ▲
      ▼    │         ▼    │
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Cluster Initial Thematic Meaning │
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Develop Thematic Structure │            All (Most) Analyses
└─────────────────────────┘                Are Done Within
            │                              Context of Research
            ▼                              Group
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Present Structure to Research Group │
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Report Findings to Participants │        Participant as Focus
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Prepare Final Report   │              Research Community
└─────────────────────────┘                as Focus
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Figure 3. **The Phenomenological Method**

Source: Thomas, S. P., & Pollio, H. R. (2002). *Listening to patients: A phenomenological approach to nursing research and practice*. New York, NY: Springer.

The Phenomenological Research Group at the University of Tennessee

The phenomenological research group at the University of Tennessee is composed of professors and students (primarily graduate students) who conduct phenomenological research or are interested in phenomenological research. The group is led by senior research professors, Sandra Thomas and Howard Pollio and is based in existential phenomenology and the ideas of Maurice Merleu-Ponty. The group meets once each week to review transcripts provided by group members. All group members sign a pledge of confidentiality prior to reading and discussing the transcripts. Transcripts are read by the group and processed for thematic units.

Group members read transcripts aloud, freeing the primary researchers (to whom the transcripts belong) to make notes during the discussion. Discussion of the transcripts begins whenever any group member finds something within the transcript to be significant. The

primary researchers are asked not to engage in group discussion, except to clarify issues that may be posed by group members and can't be resolved from the data. This procedure furthers the hermeneutic process of data analysis.

Group members may make notes on the transcripts and the transcripts are returned to the primary researchers after the group analysis, for further study. While this type of group process is communal in nature, the primary researchers are always free to accept or reject any ideas with which they do or do not agree.

Bracketing Interview

Before beginning participant interviews, a bracketing interview was performed with me by another phenomenological researcher who was himself in the PhD program and working on a phenomenological dissertation. Bracketing is "a central part of creating rigor within the qualitative research process" (Leary, Minichiello, & Kottler, 2009, p. 54). Another researcher who is familiar with phenomenological procedures performs the bracketing interview, a part of the epoché process designed to bring to awareness the thoughts of the researcher on the research topic. The Johari Widow, a device created by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (1955) is a heuristic model explaining awareness in human relations and illustrates one aspect of why a bracketing interview is used. There are four quadrants of awareness in the Johari model – open (known to self and others), secret (known to self but not to others), blind (known to others and not to self), and mystery (unknown to either self or others). This device illustrates how the open area may be increased through the processes of disclosure (diminishing the secret area) and acceptance of feedback (diminishing the blind spot), processes that are part and parcel of bracketing and epoché.

After the bracketing interview was conducted, it was transcribed and brought to the research group. One member of the group read the interviewer's questions while another interviewer read the researcher's responses. The members of the research group then analyzed the transcript in the same manner that they would do for participants' interviews later on, suggesting themes that may influence the researcher's analysis of the data in subsequent interviews with participants. Because we can never have a complete reduction, this process is not designed to rid me of preconceptions, but to bring these to my attention so that I may navigate through the research flow without running aground on unseen sandbars of belief, to "make transparent, overt and apparent the researcher's personal values, background, and cultural suppositions… in an effort to minimize their impact on the phenomenon under investigation" (Gearing, 2004, p. 1445).

This process in existential phenomenology is designed to practice reflexivity and allow the researcher to examine his own positionality related to the subject. Bracketing and reflexivity are both viewed as part of the research method because, as Ahern (1999) observed, "bracketing and reflexivity are fruit from the same tree. One must be reflective in order to bracket" (p. 410). It is also part of the hermeneutic process that will be used to interpret participants' interviews when searching for thematic data.

Reflexive bracketing requires that I state my positionality, which is especially significant from the hermeneutic, interpretive perspective because I am interpreting and trying to make meaning of others' experiences. Positionality is a way to locate the space that I occupy as a researcher and through which I come to this research (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001). This awareness of and interaction with positionality is a way to practice radical reflexivity that is crucial in qualitative research (Brown, 2006). As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) stated, "as qualitative researchers we are not separate from the study, with limited contact with our participants. Instead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it" (p. 61).

The elicitation of rich descriptions that characterize interpretive phenomenology may be helped or hindered in this study due to the fact that I am a "native going native," what Edwards (2002) termed a "deep insider" (p. 71). Paradigms that are an integral aspect of being a deep insider can both help and hinder the research process. As Barker (1992) pointed out, extending the concepts proposed by Kuhn (1970), paradigms enable us clearly to see things when they conform to our presuppositions but hinder us from seeing things that disagree with the way we think things are supposed to be. In order to help negotiate this complication, radical reflexivity, what Finley (2003, as cited in Brown, 2006) called "subjective self-awareness" (p. 182) and Rennie (2007, as cited in Leary, Minichiello, & Kottler, 2009) termed "awareness of self-awareness" (p. 53), was practiced through a variety of measures: constant awareness of the issue and the practice of meta-cognition throughout the research process; triangulation the phenomenological research group; and solicitation of participant comments on themes and thematic structure.

A senior researcher who was well versed in existential hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy and the phenomenological method itself led the research group. All attendees at the research group meeting were provided with transcripts after signing a confidentiality form. Participation from all individuals attending the research group was sought during open discussion, but those attending also made written comments on the provided transcripts, and these were returned to the researcher at the conclusion of each session. This allowed the researcher to receive feedback from all who chose to provide it.

Positionality

I come to this research as a 48-year-old, white male in the lower-middle class. I have a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology with a specialization in Adult Education. For the past ten years I have worked full time in corrections as a GED/ABE instructor in residential treatment for substance abusing felons and in the county jail, as a correctional counselor in residential treatment, and as the alcohol/drug coordinator for the sheriff's office's community alternative to prison program (community corrections). Epistemologically, I place myself in a constructivist paradigm, while ontologically I would say I am a relativist.

Results of the Bracketing Interview

As was noted in the positionality statement, I was a GED/ABE instructor with students who were mandated to attend educational classes for several years. The bracketing interview revealed that I held the very strong opinion that the teachers in the study would see their experience in a similar manner as I saw my own experience. This assumption was partly derived from my talking to other GED/ABE teachers about their experiences in the normal course of my work as a GED/ABE teacher and my work with GED/ABE teachers, even when I no longer taught GED/ABE classes. Co-workers talk to one another about their experiences as this provides, on some level, a manner in which to process those experiences. During these talks, it was obvious to me that we shared many of the same experiences. This was an opinion that became especially apparent in the bracketing interview.

Analysis of the bracketing interview also suggested that I focused quite a bit on the students. While I see this as a part of the rich, thick description that is sought in phenomenological interviews (describing one's experience in Death Valley, one may talk about the heat, the sand, rattlesnakes, and scorpions as a part of creating a setting for understanding the experience), it was a useful reminder that, despite the setting, it was the teachers' experiences that were the phenomenon under consideration, and these details provided opportunities to explore those experiences in more detail.

One question that arose from the bracketing interview was suggested by its absence. This question was, "Why do you do what you do?" Although the question was not in the bracketing interview itself, the analysis by the phenomenology group suggested that I had an attitude that teaching court-mandated clients, clients who were "bottom of the barrel," was elite, that is, this special kind of population required a special kind of teacher. While the research on working with correctional students who are incarcerated certainly suggests that one must have some sort of proclivity for the work, I would extend the setting to include those who work with correctional clients who are either incarcerated or in the community. As for the question of why I do what I do, I engage in work with those who are often viewed as incurable and beyond help because they are the ones who need help the most. I am reminded of the scripture: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40, *Holy Bible*, KJV).

Participants

Prior to beginning the search for participants, approval for this study was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Tennessee. Only after approval of the request, and in accordance with the conditions set forth in the request, did solicitation for participants begin.

Participants were GED/ABE teachers who were working with adult students in community corrections educational programs at the time, or had worked with community corrections students within 12 months of the interview date. Participants were selected by convenience sampling and snowball sampling.

I began by approaching the GED/ABE instructor at a local facility by telling him that I was doing a study and looking for volunteer participants to interview. I then solicited recommendations for other possible participants from there, repeating the solicitation process with each participant.

Table 1. *General Participant Data*

Participant	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Adam	M	47	W	GED, ABE	4.5, 4.5	1	N	n/a	40, for position
Blizzard	F	53	W	GED	1	8	Y	Math, History, Government, Economics	n/a
Carla	F	48	W	GED, ABE	18, 23	8	Y, Expired	Elementary Education, K-6	40, for position
Debbie	F	63	W	GED, ABE	10, 10	10	Y, Expired	Psychology, Sociology	40, for position
Elaine	F	51	W	GED, ABE	4, 4	8-15	Y	Math	40
Flo	F	51	W	GED, ABE	30, 30	10-12	Y	Elementary Education	12
Gomer	M	59	W	GED, ABE	14, 14	9-14	N, has waiver	n/a	12

A – Sex; B – Age; C – Ethnicity; D – Subjects Taught; E – Years of Teaching Experience in Each Subject; F – Number of Students in Typical Class; G – Teaching Certification, Y=yes, N=no; H – Subjects Certified to Teach; I – CEU's required each year for Certification

I also contacted community corrections programs both within and without the state of Tennessee, asking them if they mandated their clients to attend educational classes if they did

not have a GED diploma and, if so, to whom were the clients referred. I then contacted the educational provider to which the students were referred, spoke to the appropriate contact person, explaining my interest in speaking with teachers who worked with court-mandated students and who would like to volunteer for the study.

   Participants were provided with and signed an IRB-approved informed consent form prior to interviewing. The consent form contained the research question, procedures to maintain anonymity, a statement that they could withdraw from the research at any time and pertinent instructions and contact information for addressing any concerns about the research process.   All participants were given pseudonyms at the beginning of the interview. The demographic data for the participants is included in Tables 1-3.

   It should be noted that in phenomenological interviewing there is only one question. This question takes the general form, "What is your experience of _____?" although the exact form of the question may vary somewhat. The intent of the question is to bring participants' experiences to the fore so that the essence of the experiences can be studied. The researcher may pose test questions to other individuals prior to interviewing participants in order to refine the question that ultimately will be posed to participants. Subsequent interview questions, after the first, are for clarification purposes and to elicit the rich, thick descriptions necessary to define eidae. A researcher should never introduce a follow-up question that has not been previously introduced by the participant in her dialogue. Interviews ended when data began to be repeated and after the participants were asked if they had anything else they wished to say, giving them the opportunity to provide a full response, and they declined to continue.

Table 2. *Previous Experience of Participants*

Participant	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Adam	N	N	N	Y, on the job	Y, on the job	N	BA	Sociology
Blizzard	N	N	Y, in college	Y, observation and mentoring	N	N	MA	Political Science
Carla	N	N	Y, in college	N	N	N	MA	Counseling Psychology
Debbie	N	Y, social work and juvenile court	N	Y, work in corrections	Y, work in corrections	N	BA	Social Work
Elaine	N	N	N	N	N	N	EdS	Education
Flo	N	N	N	N	N	N	BA	Elementary Education
Gomer	N	N	N	N	Y, observation	N	MBA MA	Management

A – Formal Training in Adult Education, Type; B – Formal Training with Community Corrections Students, Type; C – Formal Training with Disabled Students, Type; D – Informal Training in Adult Education, Type; E – Informal Training with Community Corrections Students, Type; F – Informal Training with Disabled Students, Type; G – Highest Level of Education; H – Major Area of Study

   Seven participants were included in this study. Data saturation appeared as early as five interviews. While there is no consensus about what constitutes data saturation within phenomenological research, the guidelines set forth in Thomas and Pollio (2002) state that

saturation is generally viewed as having been achieved when no new themes are forthcoming from the data and already existing themes are being repeated. Using an informal rule of thumb from the research group, *n*+2, to determine the number of participants, two additional interviews were conducted after data saturation was reached at the fifth interview. No new grounds or themes were apparent in these interviews, and the ground and themes already noted in the data were repeated. Based on consultation with senior phenomenological researchers in the phenomenological research group, seven participants adequately exhibited data saturation.

Table 3. *Types of Instruction Used by Participants*

Participant	A	B	C
Adam	Individualized instruction, Teacher led small groups	Computer assisted instruction, textbooks, workbooks, teacher made materials	Workbooks
Blizzard	Individualized instruction, teacher led large groups	Textbooks, workbooks, teacher made materials	Workbooks
Carla	Individualized instruction, teacher led small groups, peer led student work groups, field trips	Computer assisted instruction, textbooks, workbooks, teacher made materials	Workbooks
Debbie	Individualized instruction, teacher led small groups, teacher led large groups	Textbooks, workbooks, teacher made materials	Teacher made materials
Elaine	Individualized instruction, teacher led small groups, teacher led large groups, peer led student work groups	Textbooks, workbooks, teacher made materials	Workbooks
Flo	Individualized instruction, teacher led small groups, peer led student work groups	Computer assisted instruction, textbooks, workbooks, teacher made materials	Computer assisted instruction
Gomer	Individualized instruction, teacher led small groups, teacher led large groups, peer led student work groups	Computer assisted instruction, textbooks, workbooks, teacher made materials	Teacher made materials

A – Teaching Modalities Used; B – Teaching Materials Used; C – Teaching Material Most Frequently Used

Adam

Adam is an educational coordinator in a community corrections program. The community corrections program where he works represents the highest level of supervision for individuals on probation. All of his students are felony offenders. Adam is a former law enforcement officer and served in the U.S. Navy. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology. Like all of the other participants, he had no formal training in adult education prior to becoming an adult education instructor. Unlike most of the other participants, he had former informal training in adult education in his military duties. He teaches both GED and ABE, and he has taught both for 4.5 years. Adam sees part of what he does as treating students with a respect they may not get elsewhere and having expectations for them:

> And I just pointed out to him, I was like, you know, and I said, "Other people, teachers that you've had in the past in a classroom setting that, you know, that you eventually wound up, you know, being kicked out of, this is a whole different ballgame. You don't have any choice, you have to be here, you're not going to quit, and I'm not going to let you get over – I'm not going to let you do things, say you can't do things, 'cause I know you can." (Adam, 27-32)

Adam raises the level of expectation in his students and then helps them achieve those expectations to develop their self-esteem. This relationship that he develops with his students, of helping them achieve things they often do not consider themselves capable of achieving, goes beyond the job description of a GED teacher. This going-beyond characterizes the participants within this study, their concerns for their students and the subsequent relationships they develop with them.

Blizzard

Blizzard works for a probation and parole office as a GED instructor. Unlike all of the other participants, who are paid to teach GED/ABE, Blizzard is a volunteer teacher. She has a Master's Degree in Political Science. Prior to beginning her job in a probation office, she had no previous experience in adult education. She has taught correctional students for one year. Prior informal training in adult education came from her experience observing other teachers and being mentored by them. Blizzard speaks of her desire for her students to not only succeed in life but also to carry that message to others:

> But I think especially people who have walked in their shoes, they would have a lot to teach young people. Little kids, you know. "Don't do this. I did it, and I had to take this huge detour in my life, and so don't do this," you know. (Blizzard, 317-320)

Seeing improvement in the lives of her students and, through them, to society at large, is an important part of her work as a GED instructor. It is work that does not end at the classroom door, but extends into the lives of the students outside the classroom and into society.

Carla

Like Adam, Carla works in a community corrections setting where her students are felony offenders. Her facility is a Day Reporting Center, where clients without a job are required to report for eight hours a day and attend a variety of classes, from the GED and ABE classes taught by her (if they do not already have a high school diploma or GED diploma), to vocational classes, substance abuse classes, responsible thinking classes designed to change criminal thinking patterns, and mental health classes to help clients deal with issues such as anger and develop social skills. Carla views the educational experience to include not only reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also interpersonal skills. Carla has taught both GED and ABE classes for a number of years. She has a Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology. Carla views anything a student can learn as a part of her educational program:

> You know, I'm thinking of the full Day Reporting Center, which sort of encompasses everything but the kitchen sink sometimes. And, you know, learning is learning. If people are learning about how they interact or learning to do fractions or anything – you know, I think there's opportunities all day long for learning something. (Carla, 161-164)

This idea that "learning is learning" and not restricted just to subject material in defines her approach to educating her students. Rather than limit herself to a relationship based on the contents of a textbook, Carla sees all forms of interaction and relationships as fair game for learning.

Debbie

Debbie works in a community corrections Day Reporting Center. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and has taught GED and ABE classes for ten years. She began teaching educational classes when she became aware that teachers outside of corrections were afraid of her clients because they were felony offenders:

> In being a case officer with Community Corrections, one of our rules was that if they – the offenders – didn't have their GED, they were supposed to get their GED. Well, my students were real uncomfortable because some of the teachers were afraid of them. And just kind of by asking questions and talking, you know, to some of the people in the school system, I found out that that was part of the problem, that the teachers were afraid because they knew my people were felonies. They knew that we were making 'em come. (Debbie, 5-11)

Seeing that such a situation was not helpful for her clients, Debbie created her own educational program and began teaching community corrections clients as GED and ABE students.

Elaine

Elaine has an Ed. S. degree and has taught GED and ABE in community corrections for four years. She sees her educational program as a way to help students get back on track in their lives:

> That they have my sympathy that they obviously made a mistake somewhere down the line. You know, we – everybody makes mistakes. It's just obvious theirs was a little bigger than a lot of people's. But that doesn't mean that they can't get back on track. (Elaine, 34-36)

Elaine exhibits a hopefulness and optimism that she carries into her relationships with her students. Her persistent optimism eventually draws students into the educational milieu. Rather than expecting students to come to the educational relationship in a position of lesser power, she goes to the students and actively works to develop trust by shedding the persona of power.

Flo

Flo works in a community-based adult education program that serves correctional students. She has taught GED and ABE classes for 30 years. She often goes to extraordinary lengths for her students:

> I had one guy that was in jail. He got out; he was required to get his GED. He did. He was very smart, got it, no problem. Then he wanted to go on to school. So he comes in my office, he's gotta get enrolled the next day. So I call and pull some strings and got him in at (College A) in (Town A), set up for a test. He didn't show up. And I was like two hours that morning, calling and arranging for him, getting the application, getting everything filled out. He just had to go, he just had to go, and he would have got in. Some of these students,

you gotta take 'em right then because once they get out that door, it's a whole different world to them. (Flo, 82-90)

This persistent and extraordinary effort for her students helps define Flo as a teacher. Although she is often disappointed that her efforts are in vain, she continues to put forth the effort for her students.

Gomer

Gomer has a Master of Business Administration degree and a Master's Degree in Management. He works both as an adult education instructor in GED and ABE and as a vocational instructor, helping teach trade and employment skills to his students. He has worked for 14 years as a GED and ABE teacher. Gomer talks about teaching adult students as a labor of love. He sees socialization as part of the academic curriculum, what he terms the "[sociology] and psychology part" of his classes:

I: You consider that mentoring that you do, and then – that's my word – but that mentoring that you're doing and that advice that you're giving them to be part of the educational program?

P: I think it's the social studies and psychology part of the program. When you get down to how to live right, how to treat people better, and how not to screw up your life, maybe again or for the first time. But a lot of them, they have trouble. They just didn't think – just didn't think. (Gomer, 158-164)

Like Carla, who sees "learning as learning," Gomer views his role as a teacher to go beyond the boundaries of academic subject matter and extend into "how to live right."

Treatment of Data

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted at locations convenient for participants. Sometimes this was in offices, either theirs or mine (according to their preferences), and at other times it was in hotel lobbies, business centers, or a local mall. The settings of the interviews were chosen to relieve any undue burden on the participants that may have arisen from either travel or stress. While many participants were not concerned about confidentiality, suggestions for meeting places were suggested with this option in mind.

A trial interview was conducted to test the form of the question. This interview obtained satisfactory results in that it elicited appropriate responses containing rich, thick description, and it was included in the data analysis.

Participant interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist who signed a confidentially agreement prior to beginning transcription work. I reviewed each transcription and edited them for redundancies and context (as the transcriptionist often repeated words or phrases marking her pauses, and unfamiliar words or idiosyncratic words and phrases were, at times, incorrectly transcribed). This allowed me to begin preliminary data analysis while preparing the texts for analysis by the research group.

Data Analysis

After participant interviews were transcribed, I read them for meaning units and themes. Meaning units within the data are participants' words. Themes are "patterns of description that repetitively recur as important aspects of a participant's description of his/her experience" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 37). As thematic units were identified in the texts, quotations from the participants were placed underneath a broad theme heading in another document. As different themes were identified, a different color text was used to identify each theme.

Once an initial analysis of the transcript was completed (initial because thematic analysis may continue throughout the process), the transcripts were taken to the research group and read for meaning units. Words and phrases that seemed significant were highlighted, and thematic units were identified by group members who returned their marked transcripts to me at the end of the group. Not all transcripts were taken to the phenomenology group for review. Three transcripts were analyzed in the group. Three transcripts were deemed sufficient because the themes themselves were reviewed by the phenomenology group when they examined the thematic structure.

Once participants' interviews had been viewed by the group and read for thematic meanings individually and for a sense of thematic wholeness, a thematic structure was developed. This structure related themes to the grounds against which they stood out. Themes were presented, when applicable, in participants' words, as these representations tend to carry the most meaning and power and assures that the themes come from the data as "all meanings and themes must be located in the text" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 46). This structure was presented to the research group which offered thoughts and suggestions on the structure. The group review of the thematic structure was the same as that for interview analysis, with the researcher listening to the suggestions of group members before deciding on a final representation.

After the research group gave feedback to the researcher and a thematic structure was decided upon, the findings were presented to the participants who indicated their interest in knowing the outcomes of the research. This step was an attempt to continue the dialogic process and come to a fuller understanding of the eidae that have been identified. While a complete reduction may be unattainable, continued dialogue about the lived experience may further refine the understanding of the experience and the essences that have been identified. No participant responded to the invitation to continue a dialogue on the subject.

Findings

Thematic Structure

The findings in this study indicated the ground of a special relationship, a chiasm, between teachers and students. The thematic structure (Figure 4) for this study rests on the ground of the chiasm between teachers and students, the special relationship that develops between them. A chiasm is an "intertwining" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 130), and the chiasm concept is the product of Merleau-Ponty's (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968) reversibility thesis, unfinished at his death in 1961, that stated one both touches and is touched, "that to touch something is also and necessarily to be touched by it" (Dillon, 1983, p. 373). The reversibility thesis sought a phenomenological ontology in which subject and object are one. This intertwining or crossing (the word "chiasm" comes from the Greek letter, "chi," or X) between subject and object, between teacher (subject) and student (object), was described by Merleau-Ponty (1968): "I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching"

(p. 142). Young and Davis (2001, as cited in Thomas, 2005) described chiasm as "the wave when it breaks and curls over. It is the place in the wave where the water touches itself" (p. 68). The experiences of teachers and students are intertwined, crossed, and "there is a circle of the touched and the touching" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 143). The phenomenon of teachers' experiences is grounded in the chiasm between teachers and students. The teachers' experience is that they touch the students in various ways (represented by the themes within this study), and they are, in turn, touched by the students' experiences, which they, too, experience (also represented by the themes in this study). The wave, which is the teacher, touches itself, and the place at which it curls over and touches itself is the student. This is chiasm, depicted in this study as the circular ground, representative of the circle seen when a wave curls back upon itself.
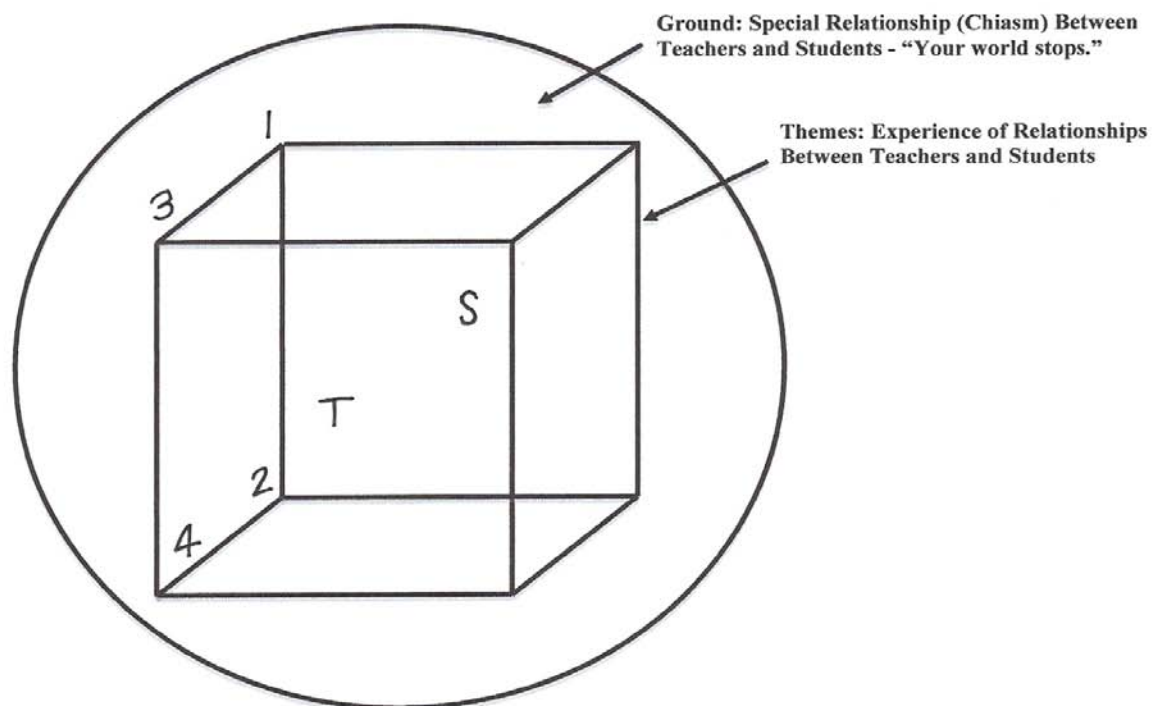
T = Teacher
S = Student

Themes
1 - "The light bulb goes off"
2 - "They realize they can accomplish something."
3 - "You've helped make the world a better place."
4 - "That was a huge warm fuzzy."

Figure 4. **Thematic Structure**

There are four themes in the study: teachers experience change in the students as seen in students' understanding educational concepts; teachers experience change in the students as seen in life changes for students outside of education; teachers experience a change in society; and teachers experience a change in themselves, noticed as emotion. These themes center around changes brought about by the relationship that develops between teachers and

students. These changes are always experienced by the teachers but may be experienced by the teachers only as reflected in their experience of the students.

The central image representing the themes is the Necker Cube, a biphasic image representing changes in perspective. The cube here represents the themes that are grounded in the chiasm between teachers and students and the manner in which the perspective of these themes can switch between teachers and students. That is to say, themes are seen from the teachers' experiences, but the teachers' experiences may be seen only when reflected in the students' experiences. On the figure, one face/phase represents the teachers (T) while the other face/phase represents the students (S). Themes are represented on the (viewer's) left edge of each face/phase. Teachers' experiences that are known only through reflection of the students are represented by numbers 1 and 2, which are on the left leading edge of the face/phase of S. Teachers' experiences recognized as occurring in the teachers, themselves, are represented by numbers 3 and 4, which are on the left leading edge of the face/phase of T.

The theme, "The light bulb goes off," (point S1), is the teachers' experiences of the students' recognition or understanding of an educational concept. Elaine's example of explaining a geometry problem to a student and the student's reaction of "Wow! This is cool as hell" (Elaine, 63-64), represents a change in the student's understanding of mathematics as experienced by the teacher. Similarly, the theme, "They realize they can accomplish something" (point S2), is the teachers' experiences of the students' recognition that they can achieve something in their lives: "I think the biggest thing is I can see the sense of pride in themselves. And, like I said, they realize that they can accomplish something" (Debbie, 72-73). The teacher only experiences this through the students' showing a sense of pride in themselves. While it is the students' experience of pride, the teachers also experience it through the chiasmatic relationship that exists between the two. The left, leading edge of the student face/phase (S1-2) becomes the left, rear edge of the teacher face/phase (T1-2).

The theme, "You've helped make the world a better place," represents the teachers' experiences of what they do, the benefits to society of teaching court-mandated students:

> I: What's the return on the investment that you see?
> P: Oh, just to society. Hopefully, he'll soon be a taxpayer. He will not be
> criminally involved. Hopefully, he'll turn his life around, make some money,
> buy his own car. He won't have to go from house to house to live, perhaps get
> an apartment and be set for life, self-sufficient. That's the payoff. (Gomer, 29-
> 33)

This theme of making a difference in society is represented by the point, T3. The theme, "That was a huge warm fuzzy," is the teachers' experiences of what they experience internally, emotionally, through their relationship with the students:

> I have to say it's just the most fulfilling labor of love, and it's four nights a week…. I
> love helping people, especially young people, 'cause I see my children in them. And
> it's just a great thing. Somebody's gotta do it. Somebody's gonna make a change and
> some of us try to do that positively, and we see the fruits of our labor once in a great
> while. It makes it worth it. I'm not here for the money at night, trust me. (Gomer, 321-
> 326)

This theme of an emotional reaction to working with the students is represented as point, T4. This is the front leading edge of the teachers' experiences (T3-4). While these experiences are within the teachers, they cannot be separated from the students, and T3-4 becomes the left, rear edge of the students' experiences (S3-4).

Within the ground of chiasm, these four themes flip back and forth, being in the leading edge of one perspective as subject and being in the rear edge of another perspective as object, and then reversing positions between subject and object. This variability adequately reflects the teacher-student relationship in this study. That such a relationship exists holds interesting questions for theory and practice within the field of adult education specifically, and educational psychology in general.

Themes

Within the overarching ground of the special relationships exist four themes, each directly an aspect of the relationships theme and indicating a change brought about by and through the relationship between teacher and students: 1. "The light bulb finally goes off," indicating that teachers see change in the students' views of education; 2. "They realize they can accomplish something," indicating that teachers see a change in the students' views of themselves; 3. "You've helped make the world a better place," indicating teachers see themselves making a change in society through the students; and, 4. "That was a huge warm fuzzy," which indicates a change within the teachers themselves.

Theme 1: "The light bulb finally goes off."

This theme suggests that teachers see a change in the way students view or understand education. The metaphorical image of a light bulb going off, used to refer to the experience of understanding, is used by more than one of the participants to describe what they experience in the students.

> And then, you know, and then you reward 'em, you know, with praise when they do accomplish something, when the light bulb finally goes off, so to speak. (Adam, 32-34).

> You know, a lot of times you don't know, you don't see the light bulb come on; sometimes you do. And a lot of times you're not sure of whether or not they're getting it or not. And this, you know – you spend a lot of time and effort and pushing sometimes when people don't necessarily see the need for what you're trying to get them to do. And it, you know – it sort of – it makes you feel better when they realize you were right, you don't always get that but sometimes you do. I would say, you know, "Okay, look, I told you so. I told you this would be worthwhile." [Laughs] So I guess it's sort of being able to share that with them and, you know, have them see that there was a reason or a benefit for all the hard work. (Carla, 37-45)

> Well, yeah, when, for instance, the student that we were talking about earlier, that I showed him how to do a particular geometry topic and he was like, "Wow! This is cool as hell." (Elaine, 63-64)

> I think when I have a student who gets their GED and then goes on to trade school or – I don't know that I've really had any that have gone on to college, but some of them, I think the biggest thing is that it helps them get a job, and they realize that that helps them get a job and maintain a job. And I think that's the biggest thing that I've seen. (Debbie, 34-38)

And we're trying to get their reading skills up, and when you do that, you open up a world to people and – even if it's just reading the – the junk they want to read, you open up a world to them. (Blizzard, 368-369)

And they know when you leave here, you may see me in another capacity where you'll be getting your job, and you better not have another tattoo. [Laughs] Sometimes those little idle threats – but they're made to be positive. And it gets through to them. If you laugh about it, think about it, they remember it. They really do. (Gomer, 178-181)

Theme 2: "They realize they can accomplish something."

This theme represents what teachers experience when students change the way they view themselves. At some point there is a realization in the students that they can achieve personal goals, and this realization is transformed into self-esteem:

Yeah, but the ones that stand out are the ones that, you know, try. Whatever I give 'em, they try it. And – and – I mean, there may have been some temporary setbacks with some of them but they verbally will say, you know, "I want to finish this. I want to get this done," you know. So it's not just me they're trying to please. They are trying to please themselves. (Blizzard, 164-168)

I mean, it, you know, increased his self-esteem, and, you know, it helped with his desire to continue to learn more, even though at times he had gotten very frustrated with it. And, you know, it just seemed to lead to the next level. (Carla, 29-31)

And I think, for me, the thing that makes it worthwhile and one of the reasons that I've done it for so long now is that with offenders, when they realize that they can accomplish something, and they get that piece of paper saying you passed your GED, it's a real boost to 'em, and they can – they realize that they can accomplish something and that they can do some things that they maybe didn't realize that they could do before. (Debbie, 24-29)

He – once he got into it and – and, you know, I had expectations of him and helped him along, I think he realized that he could accomplish some stuff, that he did have some self-value that I don't think he had before. (Adam, 11-14)

And I pull everything in, as you might already have surmised, but each time I pour myself into this, and if they screw up, I take them somewhere and I – I kind of get in their face. "What do you think you're doing?" You know? Some of them tear up, you know, "I'm sorry, Gomer." … And they don't do it again. But you've got to push. Nobody else is doing it. Real school system didn't do it for them, whatever reason. It just didn't work for them. You fill in. This has worked for some of the younger ones. They're just not used to it. You always love to hear, "Man, if you'd been my teacher in high school, I'd have never left." (Gomer, 302-309)

Theme 3: "You've helped make the world a better place.

This theme indicates that teachers experience what they do with students in the classroom as nothing short of making a positive change in society. This belief is well founded if we remember that GED attainment positively correlates into less recidivism within society. As the students succeed, not only do the teachers succeed but society succeeds, as well:

You've helped make the world a better place. (Carla, 88)

Well, I'm a part of society, so, you know, I mean, I've got kids and stuff. I don't want – you know, I don't want them to wind up being a victim. And, hopefully, you know – and I look at it as like, you know, most of our clients have children, whether they're active in their lives or not. Hopefully, you can break that cycle that a lot of these people have found themselves in. (Adam, 106-114)

I want them to get it and then move on to something else to become a more productive member of society, because they need to. They don't need to keep being – especially, the ones that may be a little bit older, they don't need to keep staying at this level in their life. They need to move on to something higher than this. (Blizzard,279-286)

Because anytime you can help someone, teach 'em something and, you know, meet a goal that they're trying to achieve, it's good for everyone. (Elaine, 84-85)

I think one of the neatest things that I've seen is that they'll come because they have to, and then they'll say, "Can I bring my mother?" my father, my sister, my brother, my girlfriend, my boyfriend, my husband, my wife, and that's another way that we've gotten students. So I have had a mother and daughter graduate and get their GED together. I've had a son and a mother get a GED together. (Debbie, 20-24)

And, too, if you get that one, it might be the – the gang they – not a gang, but their buddies, they can say, "Well, you know, if he can do it, I can do it." So that's – 'cause most of them are – the ones that's on probation, they've been incarcerated together, and, you know, they're – or they've been maybe in trouble together. And so, you know, it's a thing that, "Well, if it helps him, you know, I might do that too." (Flo, 570-574)

I: What's the return on the investment that you see?
P: Oh, just to society. Hopefully, he'll soon be a taxpayer. He will not be criminally involved. Hopefully, he'll turn his life around, make some money, buy his own car. He won't have to go from house to house to live, perhaps get an apartment and be set for life, self-sufficient. That's the pay off. (Gomer, 29-33)

Theme 4: "That was a huge warm fuzzy."

This theme, still seen through the relationship with the student, indicates a change in the teachers through how teachers experience students' successes. The terms *pride*, *accomplishment*, *validation*, *confirmation*, and *rewarding* fill the teachers' experiences of working with their students:

> As long as they use it for good and don't go rob a bank with it or something. But just a – it's just a joyful feeling. (Carla, 89-90)

> It's just a sense of accomplishment on my part, you know. (Adam, 114)

> Well, of course, it makes you feel good. That's your biggest thing in teaching. You're not in teaching for the pay. (Elaine, 59-60)

> Well, you know, again, I'm real proud of 'em, and I usually, you know, praise 'em and say, "Well, I'm proud that you got it. I hate that that's the way you had to get it, but I'm proud that you got it, and that'll give you maybe a leg up on getting a job out here now." (Debbie, 67-70)

> So that was a huge, you know, warm fuzzy. (Carla, 190)

> Well, it's just the feeling that you have that you've actually helped someone, and, I mean, you don't receive nothing, no – but you've actually – it's just like you said, you know, you get up and hope to have a good day, and – and if you actually, you know, accomplish what some of your students do, that you know you've helped them. And it's – it's rewarding to know that, you know, you've… to help someone that will maybe benefit them in life and – and to accomplish some of their goals. (Flo, 392-397)

> I have to say it's just the most fulfilling labor of love, and it's four nights a week…. I love helping people, especially young people 'cause I see my children in them. And it's just a great thing. Somebody's gotta do it. Somebody's gonna make a change and some of us try to do that positively, and we see the fruits of our labor once in a great while. It makes it worth it. I'm not here for the money at night, trust me. (Gomer, 321-326)

Discussion

The findings showed that teachers experienced a special relationship with students, a relationship chiasm (the ground of "Your world stops") that was experienced not only through teachers' direct experiences (themes of "You've helped make the world a better place" and "That was a huge warm fuzzy"), but through teachers' experiences of their perceptions of students' experiences ("The light bulb goes off" and "They realize they can accomplish something").

This special relationship chiasm is reminiscent of Buber's (1965) I-Thou relationship, in which a genuine relationship exists between two individuals, such as teacher and student. The I-Thou relationship is distinguished from the I-It relationship, a relationship in which the student is seen as somehow disconnected from the teacher. In the I-Thou relationship, "the Thou is no longer one thing among others; rather, the whole universe is seen in the light of the

Thou, and the Thou is the light of the Universe" (Adkins, 1999, p. 176). The teacher's experience of "your world stops" is a wonderful example of the Thou becoming the "light of the universe." It is a relationship in which the distinction between the subject and object ceases to exist, as Merleau-Ponty (in Merleau-Ponty, & LeFort, 1968) suggested in his reversibility thesis. Subject and object become united as one world: "The educator approaches each student as another world – connected with that of the educator and others, both visibly and invisibly" (Morrison, 1985, p. 11).

This connection is undertaken on the part of the teacher: "We do not seek the Thou, nor can we capture it. We open ourselves and meet it. The relationship is reciprocal" (Hendley, 1978, p. 141). This relationship is not static, just as worlds are not static as they spin through the universe. "The relationship," said Buber (1965), is election and electing, passive and active at once" (p. 62). The teacher and the student both absorb the influence of the other and responds (Morrison, 1985). This is represented in the multi-phasic nature of the Necker cube, which alternates perspectives as one looks at it. In the I-Thou relationship, the teacher "can live the common educational event from the standpoint of the student as well as from his own" (Hendley, p. 142). This sense of empathy (Einfülung and Ineinander) creates the I-Thou relationship: "Embodied, we recognize others existing in their body worlds. We feel a sense of kinship. I recognize the other and, at the same time, perceive the other resembles me. We are implanted in the shared world" (Morrison, p. 11). As Merlaeu-Ponty (1964b) stated, "all attempts to live apart [are] hypocritical because we are all mysteriously related" (p. 45). This ability of the teachers to shift perspectives, to partake of the I-Thou and open themselves to the educational world of the other, is represented by the Necker cube and the teachers' experiences of both changes in themselves and changes in the students. This ability to "swing boldly over into the life of his student" (Hendley, p. 142) is also seen in the overlapping between students' experiences in the educational process (as cited in Davis, Mottern & Ziegler, 2010) and teachers' experiences of students' experiences in the current research.

These findings about the relationship chiasm, while extending general findings from other areas in educational research and thought such as Buber's I-Thou relationship and Merleau-Ponty's reversibility thesis, have specific implications for the areas of theory and practice in adult education and educational psychology. There are no prior studies on teachers' experiences working with court-mandated students in community corrections programs, and all findings in this study are new to the field of adult education. A comparison of teachers' experiences with students' experiences, however, gives some insight into common ground experienced in this special classroom where teachers work with court-mandated students. The special relationship that teachers experience with students may give insight into struggles with relationship boundaries and suggest future research in educational psychology. Findings about teachers' experiences in this study mirror experiences of teachers in adult education professional development studies and may suggest opportunities to examine the possibility of incorporating findings from this research in professional development activities.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The finding that a special relationship, a chiasm, exists between teachers and students and grounds teachers' experiences is new and heretofore unreported. While research in K-12 education has shown that "the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher" (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997, p. 63) and "teaching includes a relational component" (Frymier & Houser, 2000, p. 216), previous research has not shown how significant the relationships between teachers and students may actually be, such that a relationship chiasm

exits. Perhaps the most similar findings have come from Oreshkina and Greenberg (2010), who found that teachers' perceptions of their lived experiences in the classroom include themes of joy and good feelings, similar to the theme in this study of "That was a huge warm fuzzy." Adult learning theory has suggested that the "psychological climate… which causes adults to feel accepted, respected and supported" (Knowles, 1980, p. 47) is of the utmost importance in the practice of andragogy. The formation of a chiasm between teachers and students tends to support this assertion.

The special relationship between teachers and students is the ground in this study of teachers' experiences working with court-mandated students. Previous research in adult education, on the students' experiences in court-mandated educational programs, has indicated that the chiasm between teachers and students may be reciprocal. Davis, Mottern, and Ziegler (2010) found a theme of constraint in the students' experiences and one of their participants commented that going to educational classes was "'something I didn't want to do but after being here so long doing it, I can see my benefits from doing it'" (p. 4). This theme in the students' experiences is very similar to the theme, "You've helped make the world a better place," in the teachers' experiences. Teachers experience their work with students as creating a better society by providing students with an education and increased opportunities. Students recognize that their opportunities, or benefits, increase from participating in a court-mandated educational program. The same theme in the current study was also seen as a theme of benefits of education in the research of Davis et al.: "'I think it will affect my life real, real good'" (p. 4). Another student in the Davis et al. study stated, "'Whenever I took the first test and passed it, the first moment that I found out that I passed it, that was something that really, really meant a lot to me. I felt it in my heart'" (p. 4). The theme in the current study, "They realize they can accomplish something," shows that teachers' experiences students recognizing and valuing achievement is supported by students' experiences of accomplishment.

The congruity between the students' experiences, as presented in Davis et al., and the teachers' experiences of both their own experiences and the students' experiences, presented in the current study, provide the field of adult education with new information in this area and present the opportunity to look at these experiences and design others that explore the similarities between teachers' and students' experiences in court-mandated education programs.

Implications for further research in Educational Psychology center around findings that the ground is the special relationship between teachers and students and the relationship itself acts in the formation of a chiasm between teachers and students. Research with K-12 teachers and underachieving students (Oreshkina, & Greenberg, 2010) has shown that these teachers also focus on the students in their interactions with them. These findings that teachers focus on their students, especially in community corrections settings where a relationship chiasm is formed, mirror findings by Bohart (2000) that stated that the client is the most important common factor in therapy, a finding that supports further findings in this study indicating the relationship is the outstanding theme with teachers working with community corrections students. This mirrors studies that have found the therapeutic alliance (the relationship between therapist and client) to be one of the most efficacious factors in counseling (Asay & Lambert, 1999; Connors, Carroll, DiClemente, Longabaugh, & Donovan, 1997; Meier, Barrowclough & Donmall, 2005; Kurtz & Grummon, 1972) and findings that a positive student-teacher relationship may have positive effects on students learning (Cornelius-White, 2007; Witt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004). Studies directed at describing the parameters of effective learning relationships between students and teachers within community corrections settings are warranted.

If the educational alliance that develops between teacher and student is as powerful as the therapeutic alliance may be, then consideration may be given to the effects of this educational alliance on teacher and student, especially in the areas of transference and countertransference. Aultman, Williams-Johnson, and Schutz's (2009) study of 13 in-service teachers and their relationships with their students found that teachers often struggled with "the line" (p. 644) in teacher-student relationships. Future phenomenological research in educational psychology may consider the romantic and sexual relationships, what Davies (1998) terms "erotic transference-countertransference" (p. 749), that have developed between adult teachers and non-adult students. Is the development of such relationships a result of the relationship chiasm becoming the ground in the educational alliance and erotic transference and countertransference developing into inappropriate relationships between teacher and student? Further research is necessary to explore the dynamics of these relationships. Given the seeming rise of these relationships, or at least the media coverage of them, research in this area may be considered timely.

That such relationships exist in higher education has been the subject of Robertson's (1999) paper on managing transference in college teacher and student relationships. It would be naïve to suggest that transference and countertransference issues do not exist in adult education relationships, and the consequences of these relationships on the learning process should be examined. Wright (2004) cautions that "caring can cause conflict for teachers who do not set strict boundaries in their working relationships with students. Often the students we work with have not had the experience of good male/female working relationships. Again, there is always the danger that inmates who have had little family or friendship support can see caring out of context" (p. 200). This same relational dynamic may exist for teachers working with correctional students within the community, where institutional controls are absent.

Recommendations for Future Research

As has been previously stated, the area of adult education with community corrections students is a unique niche that has been underexplored, leaving more questions than answers. It is a vacuum that begs to be filled. Comparative studies that look at the lived experiences of teachers working with juvenile students, especially juvenile delinquent and underachieving students, may provide information about the similarities and differences among teachers working with adult students and allow us to re-examine andragogical and pedagogical assumptions in education.

The issues of transference and countertransference in adult education relationships, especially given the significance of the teacher-student relationship chiasm as demonstrated in this study, may be further explored. What do these issues mean in the negotiation of power in adult education relationships? How may adult educators address issues of equity in relationships with correctional students outside the boundaries of jail or prison practice?

The demographic data in this study indicated participants were between the ages of 47 and 63 years old. This is the developmental stage identified by Erikson (1981) as generativity, a period characterized by the undertaking of meaningful and productive work or self-absorption and stagnation. What is it about this work, teaching adult community corrections students, that attracts these teachers? Is there something unique to this population of teachers that draws them, specifically, to work with these students? During the initial bracketing for this research, I identified that I work with these students because they are the students with whom no one else wants to work. Is it possible that this challenge is present for other teachers, as well? Does such a challenge, undertaken by one of the participants as a

volunteer activity, fulfill them in a way that other, perhaps less mundane work, does not? All of these are questions that can be addressed by future research.

The demographic data also indicted that most of the participants had several years of experience teaching community corrections students. In a profession where burnout is common, what allows these teachers to endure? What brings these teachers back to the classroom, day after day, and month after month, and year after year to work with these students?

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