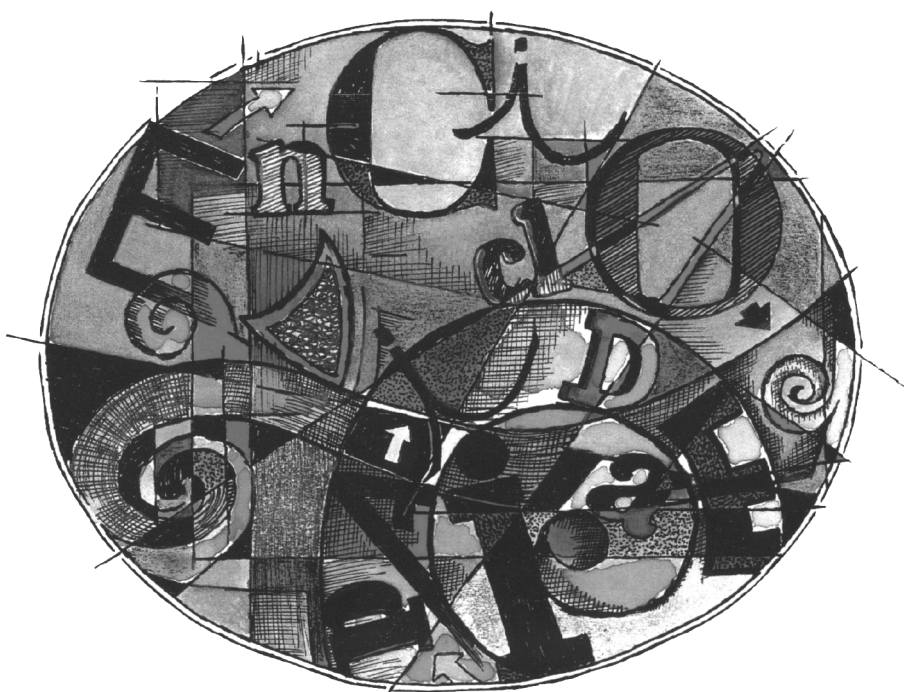


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Researching With and For Young Children: Congruence and Authenticity in Methodology

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood educators insist on recognition of young children's personal agency and have identified that young children experience life more holistically than any other age group. This paper identifies the irony that, despite clear evidence that artistic expression is essential to development in young children, to date, the field of art in early childhood education has rarely embraced phenomenology which would appear to be an ideal means of illuminating young children's experiences. We exemplify the importance of congruence and authentic artistic experience with a study into young children's experiences of displaying their art. We describe the central features of Giorgi's (1985a, 1985b) approach to phenomenological psychology and assert its appropriateness not only on the grounds that it is an empirical, clear and concise way of uncovering human experience, but also because it is congruent with current understandings of early childhood and reveals the children's authentic experiences of themselves as artists.

Keywords: Research Methodology - Education - Early Childhood - Phenomenology - Young Children

La fenomenologia, sia come movimento filosofico che come metodologia, si sviluppò crescendo in valore lungo tutto il 20° secolo come risultato dell'opera di Husserl (1970), anche se i suoi antecedenti filosofi possono essere rintracciati in un secolo addietro almeno. Anche se ebbe origine come un movimento filosofico, Husserl (1970) inizialmente definì la fenomenologia come "psicologia descrittiva" e questo permise la sua adozione da parte dei ricercatori in scienze umane per la peculiare utilità nell'aiutare la spiegazione dell'esperienza umana. Nel campo della prima infanzia, gli educatori insistono sul riconoscimento della capacità di auto direzione (agency) dei bambini in tenera età e hanno delineato che i bambini piccoli esperiscono la vita in maniera più olistica di ogni altro gruppo di età.

Questo articolo studia l'ironia che, oltre la chiara evidenza che l'espressione artistica è fondamentale per lo sviluppo nei bambini piccoli, ad oggi, il campo dell'arte nell'educazione della prima infanzia raramente ha abbracciato la fenomenologia che sembrerebbe essere uno strumento ideale per illuminare le esperienze dei bambini piccoli. Questo articolo, inoltre, esplora

Danielle J. Boone - Lisa C. Ehrich - John Lidstone

l'importanza della congruenza e dell'autentica esperienza artistica prendendo come esempio una ricerca, uno studio condotto del primo degli autori la quale ha esplorato le esperienze di bambini piccoli di mostrare e spiegare la propria arte. In questo esempio, la psicologia fenomenologica, secondo Giorgi (1985a, 1985b), rivela se stessa come un approccio appropriato per la ricerca educativa sulla prima infanzia non solo per il fatto di essere un modo empirico, chiaro e diretto di svelare l'esperienza umana, ma anche perché è congruente con l'attuale comprensione della prima infanzia e rivela l'esperienza autentica dei bambini come artisti.

Lo studio qui riportato fu condotto come parte di una tesi di dottorato. I partecipanti allo studio sono stati selezionati all'interno di una scuola metropolitana indipendente di Detroit, Michigan, USA, che pone l'accento sull'educazione all'arte e possiede un centro di prima infanzia per bambini dai 3 ai 6 anni. Utilizzando le linee guida di van Kaam (1966), i bambini di 4 sezioni della scuola sono stati selezionati a partire dai consigli delle insegnanti di sezione. I partecipanti erano bambini tra i 4 e i 6 anni; i dati sono stati raccolti durante gli ultimi tre mesi di scuola per assicurare che loro avessero la massima familiarità con le routine scolastiche e le procedure. Utilizzando il metodo fenomenologico sviluppato da Amedeo Giorgi (1985b) come base di riferimento, ai partecipanti fu chiesto di scrivere o parlare della loro specifica esperienze di un fenomeno (art work display) e le informazioni che loro hanno dato sono state accettate acriticamente con autentiche. Il processo di raccolta dati ha visto 3 fasi: osservazione, interviste introduttive, e interviste sostantive. Le fasi dell'osservazione e dell'intervista introduttiva hanno permesso di instaurare un rapporto con gli allievi partecipanti e le insegnanti, di rendere effettiva l'accettazione da parte degli allievi e informalmente valutare i livelli di agiatezza dei bambini con il processo ed il contesto dell'intervista.

Mentre la psicologia fenomenologica esistenzialista può essere facilmente identificata come sia in linea con le teorie riguardanti l'educazione infantile e l'importanza dell'arte, ha presentato alcuni problemi nella sua implementazione. Anche se utilizzare la psicologia fenomenologica esistenzialista è complesso, si rivela ancora una metodologia di ricerca efficace e potente per svelare le esperienze vissute dei bambini piccoli del mostrare il proprio prodotto artistico visuale. In termini di punto focale sostantivo dello studio sulle esperienze di bambini piccoli, cioè quella del mostrare il proprio prodotto artistico, i risultati indicano che i bambini investono emotivamente sul proprio prodotto artistico e che questo è essenziale per le loro esperienze sociali e di apprendimento nei primi anni di educazione. Cionondimeno, molto di più di questo, lo studio ha mostrato che dare cura è presa come interpretazione dei principi guida della fenomenologia in modo che questi siano congruenti con i principi dell'educazione della prima infanzia stessa, le esperienze autentiche di bambini piccoli possono essere fatte emergere in un modo tale da rendere applicabile con sicurezza l'approccio di Giorgi (1985a) all'analisi fenomenologica.

Parole chiave: metodologia della ricerca - educazione - prima infanzia - metodo di ricerca fenomenologico - bambini 3-6 anni

Introduction

Early childhood educators insist on recognition of young children's personal agency and have identified that young children experience life more holistically than any other age group. This paper identifies the irony that, despite clear evidence that artistic expression is essential to development in young children, to date, the field of art in early childhood education has rarely embraced phenomenology. This paper explores the importance of congruence and authentic artistic experience in undertaking such research using as an example, a study conducted by the first author that explored young children's experiences of the display of their art. In this example, phenomenological psychology, following the work of Giorgi (1985a, 1985b) proved itself to be an appropriate research approach and yielded insightful findings. We explore the central features of Giorgi's (1985a, 1985b) approach and assert its appropriateness for early childhood education research not only as a way of uncovering human experience, but also because it is congruent with current understandings of children's authentic experiences of themselves as artists.

Phenomenology - Philosophy and Psychology

Phenomenology had its origins in the European philosophical tradition that emerged in the late nineteenth century through the writing of Edmund Husserl (1931/1913) and phenomenologists he influenced included Merleau-Ponty (1962), Sartre (1964) and Heidegger (1962). Since Husserl, phenomenology has undergone refinements and today there are many schools of thought within it including transcendental, existential and hermeneutic phenomenology (Tesch, 1984). Common to all phenomenology are four central features including description, reduction, essence, and intentionality (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). These are now discussed. The aim of phenomenology is description not explanation. 'Description' is a semi-structured explanation of the phenomenon being investigated (Husserl, 1970/1927). It requires the phenomenologist to renew contact with the phenomenon under investigation and return to 'things themselves' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). 'Reduction' is the process of breaking down the description into more manageable pieces of data. Reduction requires the phenomenologist to 'bracket' his or her presuppositions throughout the investigation, but particularly during the process of writing the description of the phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) 'Essences' are themes or key phrases within descriptions. These essences or "essential structures of the lived experience" show the universal applicability of phenomenology. And finally, 'intentionality' demon-

strates the effect that consciousness has on an individual's description of a phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Individuals are seen as always conscious of something (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Husserl (1971/1927) devised both a philosophical phenomenology and a phenomenological psychology. At the turn of the 19th century, he was very critical about the dominance of science in psychology. This questioning was to emerge again in the 1960s by a group of psychologists from the United States, led by Adrian van Kaam (1966).

Van Kaam and his colleagues drew upon insights from existential phenomenology to develop an alternative to traditional psychology, based on the principles of psychoanalysis and behaviourism (Garfield & Bergin, 1986). At that time, psychology had been influenced by positivism, but van Kaam (1966) maintained that it would gain a great deal from a more human-centred approach (Giorgi, 1985a; Giorgi, 1985b). The result was 'existential phenomenological psychology' whose goal is to 'reveal the structure of experience through descriptive techniques' (Valle et al., 1989, p. 13). A colleague of van Kaam's who used this research approach was Amadeo Giorgi (1985a).

Phenomenological Psychology

Influenced by both Merleau-Ponty (1962) and the foundational concepts of psychology, Giorgi (1985a) believed psychology should develop its own methods and procedures for research, and not rely on natural sciences. Giorgi (1985b) suggests that by analysing and describing how things come into consciousness, 'phenomena' or lived experiences of individuals can be revealed. Giorgi (1985b) uses the phenomenological method following Merleau-Ponty (1962) as a foundation for describing his four-step research approach. These four steps are now considered.

1. *Description (of lived experience; not explanation)*

Description comes from subjects who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi, 1985a). According to Giorgi's (1985b) phenomenological approach, the investigator seeks descriptions from others who are willing to share their lived experiences. Researchers can seek descriptions from participants by interviewing them or by asking them to write down their experiences (Giorgi, 1985a).

2. *Reduction*

While there is a tendency for modern phenomenological researchers to emphasise bracketing (or epoché) as the basis of the researcher's role in data collection and analysis, Husserl (1970) asserted that knowledge of "essences" is only possible by bracketing *all* assumptions about the existence of an external world. For Husserl (1970), reduction no longer occurs throughout the investigation but rather descriptions are reduced as part of the data analysis (Giorgi, 1985a). However, for purposes of the investigation described below of young children, the researcher is required to 'bracket' preconceived notions during the data collection and analysis phases of the research to allow individual experiences to be revealed.

3. *Essence (core meaning of an individual's experience)*

Essences are context related, rather than universal. Meanings are more able to change due to their relationship to contexts or situations (Giorgi, 1985a). Here, Giorgi (1985a) asserts that phenomenological essences are context-specific. In the case of the study described here, the context includes the ages and stages of life of the children who participated.

4. *Intentionality (conscious of total experience/interpretation)*

Behaviour is seen as intentional and always directed towards a situation (Giorgi, 1985a). Intentionality demonstrates the non-dualistic nature of phenomenology, as it asserts that separation of mind from matter is not possible (Ehrich, 1999). Existential psychological phenomenological research aims to identify the essential structures or essential themes of a phenomenon. In the end, the research analysis and interpretation provides an overall statement of the experience. Whereas in the past, and to a certain extent today in terms of legal abilities, children were deemed to exercise little agency, early childhood researchers now accept that young children are people in their own right rather than adults in the making.

Phenomenological Research with Children

In addition to the congruence inferred above in relation to phenomenology and research with young children, although not commonplace, phenomenology has been described as a particularly suitable approach for studying the lives of children because it encourages expressive dialogue between children and adults, sees each child as a unique individual, and encourages renewed engagement with adult

assumptions about children and childhood (Beekman, 1983; van Manen, 1991). As a research approach, it has emerged over the last three to four decades as a way of understanding children's experiences. For example, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Langeveld's work concerned children's experiences and their ways of perceiving the world. To date, the Utrecht School, greatly influenced by Langeveld's thinking, has a broad research program exploring children's and adolescents experiences. Dutch phenomenologist, Max van Manen (1991) has connections with this school of thinking. In the 1970s, Maxine Greene (1973) and Vandenberg (1971) also used phenomenological insights to understand children's experience in education. More recently, research has been carried out that has focused on young children exploring their lived experiences of space (Beekman, 1983), time (Briod, 1989), and loneliness (Kirova-Petrova, 2000). The focus of the study that is discussed in this paper concerned young children's experiences of the display of their artwork. The research design that governed this study is explored later in the paper.

Researching Young Children's Art Experiences

The major themes that have dominated early childhood art education in research literature to date include: teaching practices, cross-disciplinary integration of the arts, arts assessment, and arts programming and partnerships (McArdle, 1999; McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002; Wright, 1991). These themes create a foundation for research into certain elements from a relatively narrow perspective of thinking; the deep meaning of the lived experiences of the children is still generally unknown.

Early childhood educational researchers are interested in learning about children's experiences so that this knowledge may inform pedagogy (Gadamer, 1999; Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Mayall, 1994). They are curious about how best to act responsibly with and responsively to children in relation to their education and general wellbeing. Research in early childhood art education has gained attention in recent years (Bresler, 1992; Kindler, 1997; Piscitelli, 1993; Thompson et al., 1995; Wright, 1991). Although a large proportion of art education research focuses on older children (over the age of 8) and adolescents (Fiske, 1999), numerous studies of young children's art experiences have been published. Such research indicates that art fosters cognitive development (Eisner, 1996; Gardner, 2004; Seefeldt, 1999) while drawing has long been considered essential to the development of a child's intellect (Derham, 2001). Within early childhood education, art has been recognised for its contribution to the developing child (Bresler, 1992; McWhinnie, 1992; Spodek, 1993). Developmentalism supports the romantic notion that every child is an artist (James et al., 1998); Eisner (2000) as-

serts the early childhood years are “a time when every child sparkles with artistry” (p. 86). Bowker and Sawyers (1988) argue that young children’s capability for experiencing art has been underestimated. It has been suggested that early exposure to art is critically important and, if left unnurtured, may be difficult to recover (Eisner, 1988). Early childhood art education studies have focused on drawing as a tool for young children’s reflections (Brooks, 2005; Chang, 2005), young children’s responses to art in museums (Anderson, Piscitelli, Weier, Everett, & Tayler, 2002; Piscitelli, 2001; Weier, 2000, 2004), and art education pedagogy in early childhood settings (McArdle, 1999; McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002) to name a few.

While the display of young children’s visual artwork is a common feature of most early childhood settings, research studies into the processes and experiences of such display are virtually non-existent (Boone, 2007; Jalongo, 1999; Kim et al., 2001; Seefeldt, 2002) despite being considered an important element of artistic learning (Derham, 2001; Eisner, 1988; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970; Seefeldt, 2002). Although there are several approaches to educating young children that are largely arts-focused, such as the Waldorf school model (Prescott, 1999), the most prominent of these in early childhood education is known amongst early childhood professionals as the ‘Reggio Emilia approach’. Reggio Emilia, a town in northern Italy, serves as an international model for early childhood education (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993), and learning centres based on it are points of reference for educators elsewhere in Europe, Australia and the United States (Edwards et al., 1993). With the possible exception of the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards et al., 1993; Malaguzzi et al., 1998; Moore, 2006), which acknowledges art as a language and recognises children’s use of artistic media as integral to the cognitive/symbolic expression involved in learning, previous research into art education approaches and artistic learning has been adult-oriented rather than being based in children’s lived experiences.

Why Phenomenology to Understand Children’s Experience of Art Display?

Several methodologies, including case study, ethnography, phenomenography, grounded theory and phenomenology, share a number of similar characteristics and could be applied with various foci to investigate the displaying of children’s artwork. However, phenomenological psychology enables researchers to elicit the essence of young children’s experience of the display of their own visual artwork. As has been intimated above, phenomenology can allow us to understand the experiences of children better by uncovering the meaning of this experience in their lives. While other methodologies would enable a different look at this same phenomenon, perhaps phenomenology is best explained in the current con-

text through what it is *not* attempting to do. It is not using detailed, semi-structured data collection involving multiple sources, as in a case study, since this purpose is to develop a general description of a specific phenomenon, based on a collection of stories from individuals. It is not describing and interpreting a cultural or social group as in ethnographic research, since this study is intended to reveal understandings of the nature of artistic lived experiences rather than on group understandings resulting from cultural interactions. It is not an attempt to find the differences between life experiences based on social and cultural factors as in phenomenography, since the study seeks to identify essential themes of the lived experiences of all participants. The approach does not aim to generate or discover a new theory, as in grounded theory, since it is based on revealing human experience and the suspension of beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation. Given the specified interests and exclusions, phenomenology remains the approach of choice in this early childhood context.

The Research Design and Context

The study described here was conducted as part of the doctoral thesis of the first author of this paper. Participants in the study were selected from an independent school outside metropolitan Detroit, Michigan, USA, which has a strong focus on art education and an early childhood centre for children aged three to six years. There are three grade levels in the early childhood centre: 1) pre-kindergarten (PK) for three-year-olds, 2) junior kindergarten (JK) for four-year-olds and 3) senior kindergarten (SK) for five-year-olds. For this study, participants were selected from the JK and SK classrooms. Although there are two classrooms for JK, one offers a half-day program (morning (JK AM) and afternoon (JK PM) session) and the other classroom offers a full-day program (JK-F). Four classrooms offer the SK full-day program. There are two full-time teachers in each classroom, but the JK program also has a full-time teaching assistant. Two visiting teaching assistants offer additional help on a rotational basis to each classroom (PK, JK and SK) in the early childhood centre. A small number of children were selected to participate in the study, from each of the seven early childhood (JK and SK) homerooms of this school.

The number of participants selected for a study is often dependent on the nature of the investigation. For this study, 13 participants were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. van Kaam (1966, p. 328) recommends that participants undertaking existential phenomenological psychological studies have six important skills:

- 1) the ability to express themselves linguistically with ease;

- 2) the ability to express emotions and inner feelings without inhibition;
- 3) the ability to express the experiences that accompany these feelings;
- 4) a relatively recent experience of the situation being investigated;
- 5) a spontaneous interest in their own experience of the situation being investigated, and;
- 6) the ability to report on their personal experience of the situation being investigated.

Using van Kaam's (1966) guidelines, children from four JK and SK early childhood classrooms within the school were selected in consultation with classroom teachers to participate in the study. Participants were between four and six years old, and data was collected during the final three months of the school year to ensure they had maximum familiarity with school routines and procedures. Children participating in the study were full-time students. The participant pool included both male and female students of various ages and abilities. Using the phenomenological method developed by Amadeo Giorgi (1985b) as a reference point, participants were asked to write or speak about their specific experience of a phenomenon (art work display) and the information they offer is accepted uncritically as authentic.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved three phases: observation, introductory interviews, and substantive interviews. The observation and introductory interview phases provided opportunities to establish rapport with the participating students and teachers, finalise consent for participating students, and informally assess children's comfort levels with the interview context and process.

Phase I involved establishing rapport in JK and SK programs through observation and interaction with teachers and students. During this phase, consent packages were distributed to JK and SK teachers and assistants as well as to the parents of the JK and SK students. These visits involved observation of and interaction with children participating in daily classroom activities. Along with these informal visits, students were assembled for a brief introductory meeting with the researcher in each JK and SK classroom.

Of the 133 students in the JK and SK classes of the early childhood centre at the school, the parents/guardians of 72 students agreed to allow their child to participate in the semi-structured interviews for this study. The introductory letter also mentioned that each student would be given a child-friendly consent form prior to the semi-structured interviews to confirm their interest in participating in the study.

Phase II involved an informal assessment of children's comfort levels with interviews to determine the study participants for Phase III. The suitability of participants for interviewing was based on observations and adult-child interactions during Phase I (observation), which involved the researcher visiting classrooms and establishing rapport with all of the children. Using van Kaam's (1966) guidelines for participant selection, 25 students from the potential pool of 72 participants were selected to participate in introductory interviews (13 girls and 11 boys from seven different homerooms).

Before commencing the Phase II introductory interviews, each child was asked to sign a child-friendly consent form to indicate his or her own interest in being interviewed. Although all of the parents of the children interviewed provided written consent, it is important to note that one child elected of his own accord not to participate in the interview. As children were given the option of participation according to the terms of the ethical considerations for this study, this child was eliminated from the participant pool.

Introductory interviews were held in the school hallway in a location commonly used for one-on-one student-teacher interactions, in full view of the participant's classroom. The duration of each interview varied from two to three minutes. These interviews allowed each participant to become familiar with the audio recording equipment and also assisted the researcher in final selection of participants for the semi-structured interviews.

For these interviews, each child was asked to respond to general questions about school life by speaking into a small microphone. Interview questions varied from participant to participant. Some of the children initiated conversation, whilst others were hesitant, only offering brief responses to questions. Since the purpose of these introductory interviews was to assess children's comfort levels with being interviewed, questions specific to children's experiences with the display of their own artwork were not included in the Phase II interviews.

By the end of Phase II, 13 students (8 girls and 5 boys) of the 25 children were identified as candidates for the substantive interviews in Phase III. A selection of boys and girls from each of the six classrooms between the ages of four and six years of age comprised the final set of participants.

Phase III was conducted in three rounds with each of the 13 participants. A list of questions was generated prior to Round One and each subsequent interview round (Two & Three) was based on responses from the previous round(s) in an attempt to understand children's lived experiences of the display of their own visual artwork. Typical questions included "Do you enjoy making art?" and "What happens to your artwork after you are finished?" and "What is it like having your artwork displayed at school?" The duration of each interview varied

from 10 to 15 minutes. Two of the interviews were conducted in two parts due to variations in the school timetable.

For each interview round, a different prompt was used to engage the participants' interest and enhance the level of comfort throughout the interview process. For Round One, each participant was given a blank piece of paper and crayons and/or markers and invited to draw a picture of anything s/he wanted to make during the interview. For Round Two, each participant was presented with two self-portraits he or she had created at the beginning and end of the school year for discussion. For Round Three, a piece of artwork created by the participant was taken from its display and presented for discussion.

Data Analysis

The Phase III interviews (Rounds One, Two and Three) of this study provided the sole source of data for analysis which followed Giorgi's (1985b) four step approach for phenomenological psychological research, including an extra step to move from the specific to the general descriptions.

Following the interviews, each transcript was read carefully in order to understand the fullness of the participant's description (Step 1). For purposes of this study, each experience was treated as an individual entity and analyzed individually. In order to remain true to the guiding phenomenological methodology, only data identified as an "experience" were analyzed. An "experience" was defined as a concrete example of a memorable event that had recently occurred in the individual's life.

The next step after identifying the experiences to be analysed was to look for meaning units within each experience (Step 2). Giorgi (1985b) suggests reading and re-reading the description to locate the essence of the experience. By breaking down the whole description into more manageable pieces, key words or phrases can be identified. Giorgi (1985b) suggests rewriting each of the meaning units using the participants' own language.

Based on the meaning units, a transformation of the experiences (Step 3) was written. It expresses the implicit psychological aspects of the meaning unit in an explicit way, transforming the participant's language to that of the researcher. The next step of this process developed a specific description or statement that is written for each experience analyzed. An example of one of the specific descriptions follows.

Specific Description (Henri 9)

Henri likes to look at all kinds of art at school. He knows that his teachers are proud of the children's artwork they put on display. The teachers know that the

children work hard to make it. He remembers painting two flowers. One of the flowers was to display at school and the second one he took home. Henri made one of the flower paintings look just like his friend Marissa's. Henri describes his friend Marissa's flower painting as beautiful. Henri was very pleased with his painting because it turned out better than he had planned. In the centre of the painting, he added many colours including – purple, dark purple and a dark blue stripe. Both Henri and Marissa modelled their paintings after one of Georgia O'Keeffe's. Examples of her flower paintings were hanging up on the art easel. He wanted to make his painting look like one of hers. Henri's teachers have never given him a choice about displaying his artwork. He doesn't know why they do not give him a choice. He wishes that they would give him a choice in the future.

The final step (Step 5) involved transforming all the specific descriptions to the essential structure of the phenomenon in the form of a general description. An additional step was included here to assist in the validation process between Step 4 and Step 5. The purpose of this step was to cross-check the transformation units which constituted the specific descriptions against a set of tentative general themes. After Step 3, the researcher generated a list of themes which emerged from the analysis of each of the participant experiences. After reviewing the collective list of themes, a list of 12 more broadly categorized themes emerged. A process of cross-checking these 12 themes against each transformation unit within the specific descriptions was followed for all of the one hundred experiences. As a result of this additional step, the 12 tentative themes were identified as essential to the phenomenon under investigation, as each participant described an experience that matched each of the tentative themes at least once during the semi-structured interviews. These themes reflecting the general structural descriptions are:

1. making art is an enjoyable and important social experience for children;
2. children's past art experiences are memorable;
3. children emotionally invest in the art they create; they make thoughtful decisions throughout the creation process;
4. children produce different types of art for a variety of purposes, both in school and at home;
5. children can feel disappointed by their own artwork;
6. children believe artistic ability improves with age;
7. children are cognizant of art-related procedures in school in relation to creation and display;
8. children enjoy seeing their own art and the art of others displayed at school;
9. children make judgments about their own art as well as that of others;
10. children are aware that people viewing their art make judgments about them based on their artistic ability;

11. children share their art in various ways with different types of audiences;
and
12. children like to make choices about the display of their own artwork.

As these themes are the focus of another paper (Boone, 2008 *in press*), they will not be discussed further in this paper.

Learning From the Phenomenological Experience with Young Children

While existential phenomenological psychology may be readily identified as both congruent with theories of both early childhood education and the importance of art, it presented some challenges in implementation. For example, phenomenological inquiry is dependent on participants providing detailed descriptions of their own lived experiences. Extracting these descriptions from the participants (aged 4-6) proved initially to be difficult in the Phase II introductory interviews without a stimulus. In response to this, in Round One of the substantive interviews, participants were provided with a blank piece of paper and markers so that they could create a drawing while answering a set of general questions about their art experiences. Even then, however, this strategy only worked with some of the participants while others found it difficult to respond to questions while engaged in the process of making art. In the latter case, the researcher adapted the data collection strategy and allowed the child to finish his/her drawing before engaging in the interview.

Another issue that affected the Phase III interviews involved variations in the school timetable. Schools are busy places and although the school staff worked with the researcher to determine an interview schedule that would minimise disruption to the child's routine, there were still a few occasions when interview times had to be rescheduled or given in two parts. While at the researcher's organizational level, this had the effect of disrupting the data collection schedule and interrupting the interview process, the break in the participants' normal schedules may in themselves have occasioned a variation in their memory of the contexts of previous artistic creations and display.

In discussing the conditions under which phenomenological studies of young children's lived experiences are conducted, the physical and emotional context of the school have been found to have been highly influential in the success of the study. The participants for this study came from a resource-rich school with a strong commitment to arts education. Given that parents or guardians had specifically chosen to send their child(ren) to this school, the participants may have been comfortable discussing their feelings and experiences in all manner of contexts of which this phenomenological study was merely one. It is possible

Danielle J. Boone - Lisa C. Ehrich - John Lidstone

that early childhood participants from a less well-resourced school and different socio-economic stratum of society in which art was not valued in the same way may have responded to the researcher in a very different way, and as a result yielded either different data or data less amenable to phenomenological analysis. It is important to note that while the aim of existential phenomenology is to understand human existence and the individual's concrete way of living (Heidegger, 1962; Heidegger & Krell, 1977) and in turn, the aim of existential phenomenological psychology is to uncover general essences which are context related rather than universal since the relationship between the experience and context cannot be separated (Giorgi, 1985b), the whole enterprise depends on participant's ability to reveal their experiences in considerable detail to a researcher. Not only are the specific findings of such a study not amenable to generalization, but the phenomenological methodology adopted may not be readily transferable to less favoured contexts.

Conclusion

The present study provides some interesting guidelines for both researching with young children in general and for the application of art based research in educational settings. Although using existential phenomenological psychology presented challenges, it still proved to be an effective and powerful research methodology for uncovering young children's lived experiences, in this case with the display of their own visual artwork. The research challenges encountered were specifically related to the need for the researcher-as-data-collector to achieve a careful balance between the technical requirements of the research approach and the social and emotional needs of the children. As the study itself confirmed, children emotionally invest in their own visual artwork and this emotional investment is essential to their social and learning experiences in the early years of education. The ultimate success of the study rests, we feel, in the willingness of the researcher-as-data-collector to place these needs of the children ahead of the technical requirements of data collection. By permitting the children to focus primarily on their "work", in this case, the piece of art they were creating, the researcher was able to elicit clear articulation of their experiences, both past and present. Given the comfort with which many young children express themselves visually, visual art appears to be particularly appropriate as a focus for such research, although it is not, we feel, inconceivable, for similar research to be conducted in the context of other art experiences. Finally, the study confirmed that providing care is taken to interpret the guiding principles of phenomenology in ways that are congruent with princi-

ples of early childhood education, the authentic experiences of young children in a wide range of contexts may be recorded and identified ways that that enable Giorgi's (1985a) approach to phenomenological analysis to be applied with confidence.

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Danielle J. Boone - Lisa C. Ehrich - John Lidstone

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