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## **Naming Student Experiences and Experiencing Student Naming**

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Educators commonly speak of student experience. But do we really know what happens when a student has an experience? In everyday life, in schools and classrooms, teachers call on students, address students by their names, pronounce, mispronounce, or confuse their names, and sometimes forget student names altogether. We engage the art of phenomenological inquiry to explore the meaning and significance of student experience, by using the phenomenon of naming—and its relevance for pedagogy—as an example and as a source for reflection.

As adults we may have had many experiences with naming, misnaming, or name forgetting. We may have heard the story of how we came to be named as we are. The name was chosen before we were born, or parents waited until they saw us and then decided on a name. Or the girls in the family take the mother's name and the boys take the father's name, or perhaps we didn't receive a permanent name until a ritual in adolescence settled a name upon us. Some of us received shortened names or nicknames—honorable or dishonorable, humorous or affectionate. Giving names seems an ordinary and yet a most peculiar act. What occurs when one gives a name? asks Derrida (1995). What does one give? One does not offer a thing. One delivers nothing. And yet something comes to be. The act of naming seems indeed a wondrous phenomenon.

The stories of who named us and why that particular name was chosen are a link to our origin and take on significant meaning for us. When someone calls us by our name (especially when this someone is a significant person), then we may feel addressed in our singularity. Calling a person by his or her first name may create a sense of intimacy and trust. Sales people of all kinds know well this phenomenological feature of naming. And sometimes we may feel irritated when a sales person adopts a tone of intimacy with our name that seems misplaced. Teachers also know that naming is a crucial aspect of the relation they maintain with students. Many teachers try to memorize their students' names early in the new school term; they realize that it is important to be able to recognize and call their students by their proper name.

Naming is recognition. We are able to recognize aspects of our world by naming them. Not only do we make things recognizable by naming them, but also we make them real somehow. That is why Gusdorf (1965) suggested that "to name is to call into existence" (p. 38). And just as we call things into being by naming them, so we ourselves need to be named to exist for others and for ourselves. Things that fall outside of our linguistic reach may stay more indeterminate. And this is also true for proper names of people. The strange thing is that people, even those we think we know, do to some extent remain indeterminate until we remember their names. Somehow, by being able to call

them by their name we seem to be able to reach them, and stand in meaningful relation to them. When, as teachers, we call students by name, we point to the singularity of a specific student, and we may take for granted that calling the name calls the student into relation with us.

To be called by my name is to receive recognition and to receive recognition literally means to be known. Someone who recognizes me thereby acknowledges my existence, my very being. This is not the same as fleetingly noticing people whom one passes in a busy street. To cognize means to know, but to re-cognize is to know again in the sense of becoming part of people's memory. When I recognize someone I revive my cognitive experience: this person has become part of my experience, my life history. He or she exists for me; this person is now memorable. It is not surprising, therefore, that naming and recognition play such a critical role in people's lives. One's very existence depends on being named and recognized—to be known by others. To paraphrase Descartes: "I am recognized, therefore I exist." The experience of recognition is inextricably intertwined with selfhood, identity, and one's sense of personal being.

In light of these preliminary reflections, it is strange that the pedagogical significance of students' experiences of naming has received virtually no attention. We wonder: how do students actually experience being called by their names? What is it like for them to be misnamed, nicknamed? Or how do they experience incidents when their names are forgotten altogether? We solicited from about 150 grade nine students and about 30 university students a school memory involving an experience with their name. Our aim was first not to determine how students thought about their name or naming incidents. Rather we wanted to try to gain insights into the experiences themselves—before the students would form opinions or thoughts about the meaning of these experiences. Asking students about their name experiences in school and classrooms does not necessarily yield experiential results. When we ask individual students questions regarding their name experiences, they may say things such as, "It is important that the teacher knows who you are." "The science teacher still did not know my name by Christmas time!" "I don't like it when a teacher calls me by my last name." Comments such as these suggest that name experiences are important to students and that they are able to tap into these experiences if only we give them the opportunity to do so. But it is important to distinguish between student accounts that offer interpretations, views, or beliefs about name experiences and student accounts that describe as much as is reasonably possible the experiences as lived through. A phenomenological inquiry requires lived experience accounts as data for reflection. To this end students are prompted to describe their experiential moments themselves. How do we orient to student experiences?

### ***Orienting to student experience***

Researchers who have taken a narrative or ethnographic approach in their inquiries tend to be sensitive to lived experience: experiences as lived through. By way of example we note a researcher who is aware of the danger of treating experience as a reductive concept, a philosophical idea, or an abstract variable. Dahl (1995), who is interested in students' early reading and writing practices, articulates the importance of focusing on the students' experience: "We need to listen to them, pay attention to what they show us about themselves and their views" (p.124). She suggests that taking student experience seriously may give teachers more relevant understandings and insights for teaching.

“Learning from children’s voices allows us to know at a deeper level who children are as learners and, because we have that knowledge, to expand and enrich our sense of what it means to teach” (p. 130). In her ethnographic study Dahl offers descriptions of the child Addie, an “angry girl” in first grade:

This teacher “called the shots” and Addie was put through her paces with no time for stalling or power plays. Addie would rebel, having tantrums over such requirements as making the letter *d* correctly or reading a sentence accurately. She wanted it to be her way, whether it was letter formation, word identification, or the decision about the next activity. She acted out and made loud groans in defiance; but the teacher kept the lesson going. It was a battle of wills. These sessions were difficult for both teacher and learner. (p. 128)

Rather than reduce student experience to some variable or general concept, Dahl aims to give us a sense of the reality of the classroom and of Addie’s mood or disposition. Yet, this description could go further, letting Addie herself tell what it is like for her in this class. Perhaps Dahl believes that a grade one child cannot tell how she feels in a situation. Dahl’s description is told from the adult perspective, not Addie’s. As well, the observational account lacks concreteness and specificity. We are told how Addie would rebel in these kinds of situations, but we do not learn how Addie “rebelled” in this specific moment when the observation took place. A more careful look may show that the child’s experiences in this situation were actually much more complex and multi-faceted. By placing the terms “rebel” and “battle of wills” on Addie’s behavior, her actual lived experience disappears from view. What really did Addie experience? And how might this experience be best described? We would have to practice close observation, trying to understand her experience from subtleties of her gestures, physiognomy, utterances, her eyes, and so forth.

What was it about being in the reading recovery room on that day that was important to Addie? Would she rather have been somewhere else? Or somewhere else in the room? How did she experience the teacher’s presence? And the researcher’s presence? Their gestures, glances, and tone of voice? Their instructions? Their attentiveness, inattentiveness, misattentiveness? Certainly, obtaining an account from a child in the primary grades has special challenges, but the use of observations alone still leaves us considering student experience from the outside. This example from Dahl’s work is taken not to criticize her work per se, but to illustrate how commonly used methodologies may unwittingly lead researchers to speak on behalf of students, rather than letting students speak for themselves.

And even if the researcher lets the students themselves speak, these accounts may still be *about* their experiences. When students are asked to tell about their school, they are likely to respond with comments such as “I have ten friends or so and at the breaks (-time) I usually play football .... My school is red, it was green before .... We can play outside, we can draw, we can play with Lego. In natural sciences we get to taste different fruits. In handicraft lessons we can make balls of wool. We usually paint several figures” (Allodi, 2002, pp. 188, 189). When researchers, such as Allodi, ask students to tell about school experience, they tend to receive general descriptions *about* experience, rather than descriptive accounts of experiences as they happened, as the children actually *lived* through them.

### ***Naming the experience of naming***

It is true that even with older children or young people, obtaining students' accounts is not easy. Some researchers feel that they have collected students' experiential accounts by interviewing them or by asking them to write about their experiences. But, as suggested above, what they may have gathered are opinions, perceptions, views, and explanations by the students—not accounts of the experiences themselves. To give an example of what we mean by taking serious a fuller meaning of the notion of student experience we offer some accounts from students.

We focus here on the student's experience of the most elemental and basic aspects of classroom life: getting to know and becoming known by the teacher, including being called by one's name. Here is an account told by a grade nine student. We call this kind of experiential account an anecdote (see van Manen, 1997). The student describes an incident experientially—from the inside out, as it were—by recalling the experience as it happened a few weeks prior to writing it for us:

"Square roots, class!" Mrs. Richards exclaims excitedly. "There's just so many ways to look at them."

Sitting in math class early on a Monday morning is never a really exciting experience. However, here I am, for I have no other choice. We are taking notes and, as all teachers do, Mrs. Richards is trying to get us actively involved in the discussion. Personally I don't see how anyone could be interested in square root signs (but let's keep that quiet).

Dutifully I raise my hand to share my insight to her first question.

Catching my eye, Mrs. Richards calls out, "Yes, Stiffany!"

I pause for a moment, certain that I have just misunderstood; she probably has just said my name "Stephanie." Glancing around the room, I spy Tiffany who gives me "the look." It is a "did-she-just-say-what-I-think-she-said?" kind of look. Tiffany is cool, though I don't know her very well.

After this momentary pause, it is evident to everyone in the room what happened just now, and immediately laughter breaks out.

Mrs. Richards, however, seems to be unaware of her mistake of mingling my name Stephanie with Tiffany's. I desperately try to look as though I have no idea about the sudden uproar, and share my thoughts about the square root problem with stifled giggles in between.

We return to taking notes, but my attention is elsewhere. I must say that I am rather pleased about the slight name confusion and not at all offended.

Now, whenever I see Tiffany in the halls, we always call one another Stiffany or Stiffy. I find it rather cute and comical. We have become friends. This new nickname seems to have connected me to Tiffany in a simple but significant manner.

What do we see here that we do not see in the account about Addie? When Stephanie relates her actual experience in a descriptive form it becomes visible for us in a way that it is not visible using other means of description. How would this account differ from the one that Dahl may have written as observer? Would she have caught on about the name confusion? Would she have been able to describe the subtle significance that is involved in naming and misnaming? Of course, we can never know for sure what Stephanie's experience was or completely understand it (that is not the aim of our interest here), but

in this type of experiential telling we see hints of what the situation might be like for her. We notice how the misnaming experience seems to have created a bond between Stephanie and Tiffany. The moment Stephanie describes is a simple one, and we see it repeated in various forms in many classrooms every year. Yet in this ordinary moment there may be something worth noting. Even though Stephanie was not offended by being called Stiffany, there must be something slightly amiss in Mrs. Richards' blending the names. Both laughter and Stephanie's focus on the episode while the class returned to square roots show us the mistakenly called name must matter in some way.

Through these experiential accounts we gain a sense of how important names are to students. After all, when a teacher calls a student by name, then something is called into being: the student as unique person. But sometimes the student is prevented from experiencing a sense of personal identity and uniqueness because of a teacher's casual habit or indifference to such sensibilities.

"Go get 'em, Mac!" he says. I sigh, but leave the bench anyways. What possesses him to give me a nickname? Does a nickname really help anybody anyways? Is Benjamin not short enough for him? He could call me Ben. Or can he not remember? Yes, maybe that is it. Maybe he just cannot remember my name. As I ponder that, I almost miss the puck as it slides down to my end. Quickly, I recover and shoot it back down the ice to one of our forwards—a player whose name our coach can spell backwards. I am a little upset. After all, this has been going on all season. "Come on Mac, keep your head in the game." He must know, though. I mean, how can you coach a hockey team and not know our own players' names? The whistle blows and I skate back to the bench, trying to think of any other names that our coach has forgotten. There is that one kid he calls Bobby, but I think that is a reference to Bobby Orr. Same with Fuehr, Wayne, and Rocket, all great old-time hockey players. I also suspect he enjoys naming people something they're not. Can there be some fabulous hockey player named Mac? or possibly nicknamed Mac? It doesn't seem very likely to me, for I know a lot about hockey and the players, and not once have I heard of a Mac.

So what should I do? What can I do? I have to make him use my proper name. How can I go around as Mac for another year? I walk up to our coach. "Hey Mac." "Sir. My name is Benjamin, remember!" "Well sure I do," he says. I exhale a sigh of relief that I'd been holding, pleased that is over with, and a little embarrassed that this name thing had gotten me all worked up.

"Your shift's up. Now get out there, Mac!"

Benjamin does not mention in this story that his last name is MacPherson. Perhaps he does not realize the physical education teacher is playing on his last name. Or perhaps he does not like to be called by his last name, especially a nickname version of his last name. But what matters is that Benjamin does not like being called Mac.

Naming is a relational experience, but by misnaming the students the teacher of Stephanie and Tiffany gets it wrong (seemingly without being aware of what goes on with the students). In contrast, the coach of Benjamin seems to want to get it wrong. Something about gender could be at play here. The coach is playing *tough* as is not uncommon in physical education classes, where the relation between coach and players tends to be boisterous. Our point is that only through listening to the student do we learn that, indeed, an experience occurred and what the nature is of such experience.

Although our focus in this chapter is not on teachers' experiences of naming students or being named by them, it is worth noting that attending to teachers' experiences can stimulate reflection on students' experiences:

The first few times that I meet my classes I remind myself to look over the class list to make sure I know all the names of the students. As I quickly rehearse the names I try to connect these names with the persons to whom these names belong. Soon some of these students I will know so well that I no longer have to remember them. I will simply know them. I will have trouble remembering the names of other students for quite some time.

For example, in my grade nine class I have a boy who looks very much like his older brother who was in my class last year. During the first few weeks of school I kept confusing and calling Tim by his brother's name Don. One day, when this happened again I could see that Tim was clearly annoyed even though he did not say anything. So, spontaneously I made a public apology to him. Of course, I felt embarrassed having to do this and my confession was somewhat like self-punishment. But I knew it important to let Tim know that he mattered to me. I told him how sorry I was that I kept confusing his brother's name and how I appreciated him for who he was.

While the teacher may never have reflected on the phenomenological significance of the student's experience of being named (in this case by a wrong name), the teacher does seem to realize that this is not an unimportant matter. The teacher senses how misnaming the student by his brother's name somehow does violence to his sense of self and self-identity—for who he is in his own right. We turn now to a student's description of an experience of being connected to a sibling by name.

"Sally Tilburn?" "Here. " The first day of school has finally arrived. Mrs. Larson is taking attendance. My older brother, Ben, attended this school for three years. He set the reputation for me. Let's just say he wasn't exactly the teachers' favourite student. The benches in the hallway saw a lot of Ben throughout his school years. Every teacher I meet and talk to on this crisp September morning makes this connection to Ben. When I confess my name is Sally Tilburn, I can see the glimmer of hope in their eyes. Hope that I am not like my brother. "Tilburn, as in Ben Tilburn?" "Yes," I respond. "Oh...I see," Mrs. Larson's voice lowers, no doubt remembering the times she had with Ben a couple years back. Everyone's eyes turn to me. The whole class realizes what type of student Ben must have been, just because of the disapproving look on Mrs. Larson's face and the awkwardness it creates. I glance at her. It seems as though she has no problem remembering who Ben was. Trying to lower my head, I can only imagine what the next few years of school will be like.

How does Mrs. Larsen's association of Ben with Sally influence the possibilities for the relationship between teacher and student? When other students in the class see Mrs. Larsen's disapproving look and then turn their gaze to Sally, what are the possibilities for Sally's relationship with her classmates? When a teacher doesn't use a student's name correctly, then the student may experience immediate and often intense feelings and thoughts.

Mrs. Smith is in a particularly foul mood this depressing Monday morning. I mean, she always seems to pick on me but today is especially bad. Science is a dreaded subject for me, but this year has to be the worst, all because of her. I raise my hand to answer her question and am really not expecting what I'm about to hear, for I have been in her class for about eight months already. But, in a horribly sharp tone, she says, "Yes Alexandria, what do you have to say?"

For a moment, I think about what to reply and then I say, "I'm sorry Mrs. Smith, but that isn't my name." (I believe that I answered quite appropriately considering the mistake she just made, after having me in her class for over eight months).

"Oh right, well get on with it then, Alexis," she answers in a terribly unkind tone.

The class erupts with overflowing laughter. Jeremiah, the class clown of course, pipes in and yells, "Her name's Alexa." And he repeats, "Alexa!"

Well, that just about makes Mrs. Smith's patience snap in half. "Shush up! All of you!" she exclaims. She is obviously embarrassed. We go on with the lesson, but I can't help but notice the slight rosy tinge on her cheeks for the rest of the period. Should I be happy, or should I not be happy, that she got the embarrassment she most certainly deserved?

We can hardly blame teachers for occasionally making mistakes with student names. The act of teaching is inherently improvisational. Teachers must instantly (inter)act in situations of contingency, and they must often lead their students through a myriad of activities in fast-paced environments where split-second decisions need to be made and where students' comments and actions are often unexpected. So it is no surprise that teachers are bound to slip up on students' names now and then. Our discussion here is not to be critical of teachers when this happens, but to call attention to students' experiences and to what it means when we try to determine what it is like for a student to have an experience. Even university students may feel sensitive to name confusions in their relations with their teachers.

Last term I took philosophy from professor Banner, who I really liked. And he seemed to like me because he often called on me and would say things like, "Frieda really makes an excellent point ..." or "Frieda, what do you think of this issue?" and so on.

Some of my friends would laugh when professor Banner called me by the name Frieda. But I did not mind so much because he really seemed to respect me. At the end of the term, after writing the test, I went up to him and said: "I really liked your classes and I think you are such a wonderful teacher. I have learned so much from your philosophy classes. However, I want you to know that I am not Frieda. My name is Jane."

Professor Banner had been smiling as I thanked him but then looked shocked: "Oh, no, I am so sorry!" But I said, "Never mind—you had it partially right. My name is Jane Friedman."

There seems to be a paradox related to Frieda and Alexa: we don't really know a person if we don't know his or her name, but we can know his or her name and not really know him or her. Likewise, we may not know a person's name but have a brief encounter and now know some aspect of the person intimately. Both Frieda and Alexa seem to hesitate about correcting the teacher. Perhaps they know intuitively that it can be embarrassing

for a person to forget someone's name. And, of course, there is the practical challenge that it is not easy to remember all names of people we meet.

Many teachers would agree that the first question educators always need to ask themselves is, what do the students who are in our classes actually *experience*? More importantly, it matters less what we, as educators, *say* that children experience; more crucial is what students themselves say. For example, a teacher may believe that he is caring about a student whom he teaches, but if the student does not *experience* the teacher's act as caring, then the teacher's belief is less relevant than what the student experiences.

### ***How to gain access to student experience***

How then can we attempt to come to understand how students themselves experience things? Here we like to show that we can ask them to describe specific instances of their experience in as much concrete detail as possible. We have done this by asking students to write anecdotes—short stories about single events. To understand how students experience teachers' use of their names, we have asked them the following:

Can you recall a name experience? Think of a specific time when a teacher called you by your name or by an incorrect name—or possibly when a teacher seemed to avoid calling you by any name. Tell what happened without explaining or giving opinions about it. Just describe the experience as you lived through it. Recall what was said by the teacher, by you, and by others. How did the teacher act, talk, and use gestures? What was the tone or feeling of the interaction? What did you say, think, feel, do? (This event may have happened recently or several years ago. Do not use real names of teachers or students.)

When we work with students we show interest in their writing and, in collaboration with the teacher, even teach them to write vivid experiential accounts. Students are given the following suggestions to increase the narrative power of the anecdote (van Manen, 1999, p. 20). An anecdote

1. is a very short and simple story
2. usually relates one incident
3. begins close to the central moment of the experience
4. includes important concrete detail
5. often contains several quotes (what was said, done, etc.)
6. closes quickly after the climax or when the incident is passed
7. often has an effective or "punchy" last line.

Depending on the events themselves and how able students are to describe them in detailed, concrete words, the anecdotes will vary in complexity and depth. For example, the following anecdote was written by a school student who recalled an experience she had in the third grade when her class was lining up in the hallway on their way to lunch.

Ms. Polanski was reminding us to get in two lines. "No pushing, no playing tag." She was coming down the line, but, in truth, I had hardly noticed. I had been daydreaming. Except that I suddenly felt that something brushed my face. I startled a bit and automatically turned my head ... but then I saw that it was the

teacher. She had stopped and now looked at me while continuing to stroke my hair out of my eyes. "Monica!" she said, in such nice voice that I felt completely warmed by her touch. "Monica," that is all she said. Just my name. Then she kept on walking down the line. I think she was still talking about not leaving the cafeteria until we're excused, but I'm not sure. I just felt so special!

Compared with Stephanie's anecdote presented earlier, Monica's anecdote is simpler, and yet also rich with meaning. Anecdotes can be meaningful because, when students are asked to write them, it is they who recall experiences that are vivid and that hold meaning for them. And it is they who relay what was said, by whom, and in what tone. The student describes how he or she felt and thought and what he or she did in the situation. In some sense the student is enabled to discover his or her own experience by writing it, and, furthermore, by writing the experience it becomes real, and it may entice the student to now reflect on it.

From the researcher's point of view, students writing their experiences as they lived through them give the researcher access to the subjectivity of classroom life. Lived experience descriptions (such as the anecdotes in this text) are written experiences that the researcher borrows in order to examine what meanings may inhere in them with respect to a particular phenomenon such as the name experience. The researcher can then interrogate the anecdotes, looking for what, at first reading, might be unseen, probing for deeper understanding of the situation and of the meanings the incident held for the students. For example, in Monica's anecdote, we see a situation that may occur in any elementary school any time of the day. There is nothing special about lining up to go to the cafeteria, library, gym, bus, or playground. And we may observe similar gestures in teachers. So what was it about this episode that made it so significant for Monica? What was it about having her name called that led Monica to feel liked? Perhaps it was that the teacher seemed to single out Monica for no apparent reason. A touch and saying the student's name creates a moment of intimacy in the midst of an otherwise ordinary situation. In this moment of connection, Monica seems to experience being "seen" by her teacher.

However, Monica's description of her experience may also be used to reflect some further on the ambiguous nature of experience itself. These reflections should make us aware that we have to be very careful with our theoretical as well as the common sense understandings of the nature of experience. In other words, the notion of student experience that we have been trying to express is still too simplistic. When we speak of experiences as data then what is the nature of these data? What do we refer to when we name something an experience? Or perhaps we may ask: How are experiences experienced? Or are they?

### ***What is named when we speak of 'experience'?***

Experiences seem to arise from the living flow of everyday existence. In German language this living sense is retained in the term *Erlebnis*, translated as "lived experience." Gadamer (1975) suggests that there are two dimensions of meaning to lived experience: the immediacy of experience and the content of what is experienced (p. 61). Both dimensions have methodological significance for qualitative inquiry. In recent years there has been a resumption of interest in the notion of experience. Scholars such as Wood (2002) and Jay (2005) are resurrecting the focus on the

meaning and significance of experience in contemporary inquiry. They argue that lived experience forms the starting point for inquiry, reflection, and interpretation, from Hegel through Heidegger, to Foucault and Derrida. This thought is also expressed in the well-known line from Merleau-Ponty (1962), "The world is not what I think, but what I live through....If one wants to study the world as lived through, one has to start with a direct description of our experience as it is" (pp. xvi-xvii).

The "contents" of experiences are recognizable in the sense that we can name and describe them, or perhaps they come into being as experiences as we name and describe them. No doubt we could distinguish many more such experiences in the above student accounts. For example, in Monica's description we could distinguish the experience of waiting, the experience of being startled, the experience of the teacher's look, the experience of the touch of the teacher's hand, the experience of hearing one's name spoken in a certain tone of voice, the atmosphere of the cafeteria, and so forth. Every nameable experience seems to acquire an identity that makes it potentially distinguishable from other experiences. We could single out any of these moments that we just named and ask, "What is the phenomenological meaning of that experience?" What is the phenomenology of being startled by feeling something touching our face? Next, it is possible to focus more carefully on the nature of touch and ask, "How is the experience of being touched or struck by an object different from being touched by a person's hand? What is the phenomenology of the human touch? How is being touched by a friend or a teacher experienced differently from being touched by the hand of stranger?"

Indeed, phenomenology always asks those sorts of questions: "What is the nature and meaning of this or that experience-as-we-live-through-it?" "How does this phenomenon present itself as a distinguishable experience?" It is often baffling how the meanings of experiences are so much more difficult to determine than the meaning of concepts which can be studied by examining their use in language. Gadamer explains that all lived experience has a certain immediacy that eludes every determination of its ultimate meaning. Why? Because when we try to recover the contents of our experiences through memory or reflection we are in some sense always too late. We can never recover experience as it happened in the instant of the moment. Moreover, says Gadamer (1975), everything that is experienced "is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life" (p. 67). Indeed, what belongs to a certain experience cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or in what can be grasped as its meaning.

The phenomenological interest is focused on the *phenomenon* as an aspect of our existence. It tries to grasp the living sense of the moment before we have lifted it up into cognitive, conceptual, or theoretical determination or clarity. Indeed this conceptual or theoretical clarity would be misleading or at least full of assumptions. We, therefore, try to come to an understanding of a phenomenon by constantly investigating and questioning these (psychological, personal, cultural, theoretical) assumptions. We ask, "What is experienced in that moment before we reflect on it, before we conceptualize it, and before we even name and interpret it?" Only through this type of questioning can we come to discern the complex and subtle nature of experience when we speak of *student experience*.

We need to acknowledge that even in naming a student experience we have already lifted it up, so to speak, from the raw reality of human existence. That is why we have to constantly remind ourselves that we are trying to understand not some named concept, but the prereflective existent—that raw moment or aspect of existence that we lift up and bring into focus with language. Is experience ultimately a linguistic phenomenon? And how is the body involved in our experience as we live it from moment to moment? Does experience already have meaning before we are consciously aware of it? Or are these experiences more primal phenomena? And how is this prereflective moment already part of our lived experience? The point for us is not that we should try to develop philosophical answers to these questions, but that we must remain aware of their openness and reach.

### ***The pedagogical significance of orienting to student experience***

So what we are learning (coming to understand?) about any experience, and the experience of naming in particular, is that we need to realize that even by naming an experience we already do violence to the prereflective nature of experience as we live it from moment to moment. And yet, we must try to do the impossible and reflect on the possible meanings of the experiences that we live.

I am a foreign student who has been in Canada only for a few months. My Chinese name, Huixia Ling Ho, is difficult to pronounce for Canadians. I am also rather quiet in my classes due to my inadequate English skills. All in all that makes me feel rather invisible in class. In one of my classes I am impressed by the teacher's ability to motivate students' participation in class discussions. The teacher learned everyone's name very quickly despite the large class size. He always calls students by their first name. However, he rarely mentions my name. I thought that I did not mind it that much. But one day, when he discussed each group project, calling each student's name as if he appreciated every member's effort, I found myself waiting for my name to be mentioned. At last it was our turn. There were four in our group. I concentrated on the teacher. He began to name the first two individuals in our group. Then, I saw him hesitate for a moment and skip my name to the fourth member. I was unrecognized. I was a bit surprised at myself. I did not expect that I would be so disappointed. I was embarrassed. I was painfully aware of my Chinese name which makes me who I am. I realize that I have become nameless, a nobody in this class.

Huixia, who is a secondary school student, shows remarkable insight into her experience. But we should realize that this awareness is only possible because she has expressed her experience in language (here in written form). She seems to realize that, at the collective level, her Chinese name gives her a certain identity, but she also realizes that at the personal level her name refers to her singularity, her uniqueness. On the one hand, it is her uniqueness that is denied by the teacher's not including her by her name. By the teacher forgetting or skipping her name she cannot feel recognized—she feels nameless. On the other hand, her cultural identity is also at stake in the teachers' name forgetting. Huixia seems to experience hurt that is associated with the withholding of recognition at two levels of subjectivity: her universal subjectivity (being Chinese) and her singular subjectivity (being her own unique self).

Even though we seem to be speculating about Huixia's and, earlier, Monica's inner lives, we need to point out that this is not really our intention. We are not their teachers and we are not really able to "know" Monica or Huixia as unique individuals. Our subject is not this or that student; our subject is the phenomenon (the experience) of naming. Monica's and Huixia's descriptions of a naming incident are examples of this human phenomenon (what it is like to be named, misnamed, unnamed, etc). And so are all the other experiences we borrow from students. We are trying to construct a qualitative text that makes the experience of naming recognizable to readers. In this recognition lies the possibility of becoming more pedagogically sensitive to the experiences of individual students such as Monica, Stephanie, Alexa, Jane, and Huixia. A teacher practitioner has a broader interest than we do in this text: the teacher must be interested in his or her students' individual experiences as well as in the phenomenon of the naming experience. In concrete classroom situations, the phenomenological and the personal understandings merge into a fuller pedagogical understanding.

From the perspective of professional practitioners, there are always two pedagogical aspects to a phenomenological interest such as the student experience of naming: on the one hand, there is the experience of naming as a human phenomenon, and on the other hand, in actual teaching-learning situations there is the inner psychological experience of this or that particular student. Of course, phenomenology, as a philosophical methodology, cannot help us understand the psychological lives of particular students. As researchers we can only focus on phenomenological understanding. And yet, there is always the larger picture of the actual lifeworld where teachers must deal with the psychological lives of real children. At the general level, teachers can increase their thoughtfulness by reflecting on the phenomenological meaning and significance of naming; and at the level of everyday thinking and acting the teacher also needs to know psychologically, as best as possible, how a particular student experiences a specific learning moment or specific classroom incident. In concrete and practical pedagogical relations and situations these two types of understanding (phenomenology and psychology) cannot really be separated. They are grasped together and enacted, as pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact, in the present instant of each teaching moment.

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