

The Student Experience of Other Students

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Brian Kelleher Sohn

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Abstract

The literature on higher education classroom climate and its relationship to teaching and learning is dominated by studies and theorizing regarding the role of the instructor. But when instructors use learner-centered approaches and diffuse the role and authority of the teacher, students gain a higher level of influence in the learning experience of their peers. In this phenomenological case study of a unique graduate seminar, I interpreted the thematic structure of the student experience of other students (SEOS). Data sources included field notes, audio recordings of class sessions, weekly student post-class reflections, and individual and focus group interviews with students. Students experienced each other as “All Together in This Space,” the context of their experience in which the following themes were figural: Student “Investment” was described in terms of subthemes “Responsibility,” “Getting Hands Dirty,” and “Genuineness;” students were “Completely Caught Up” in each other’s stories and course content, and the experience of other students “Spilled Out” of the typical classroom setting; and students experienced “Coming to Appreciate Variations” in a learning progression that included subthemes of “Diversity,” “Seeing Variations,” and “Changes in Being.” The transformational learning students described as part of their SEOS included valuing things they did not value before, changes in perspective on major areas of life like time, and the ability to listen even in the face of strong disagreement. Thus, a strength of this study is its ability to capture longitudinal progression over the academic semester. The results from this study provide a unique contribution to the fields of classroom climate and transformative learning with a road map that

instructors can use to help their students engage more deeply with course content and each other and a classroom climate framework that can guide course design.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I began my graduate studies in 2011, I took a course called Existential Phenomenological Psychology (EPP) on a recommendation from my advisor, Dr. Katherine Greenberg. I did not know what to expect, but like many others in the course, I could tell after the end of the first class session that it was different. The professor and a few students set a tone, and some students shared more personal information than I expected. The professor engaged with each student such that I knew these introductions were not token. In subsequent class sessions we looked at giant beer bottles, Necker cubes, and rotating trapezoid illusions. We discussed art, music, and poetry. We engaged in phenomenological research to discover the content of the course. I was taken by it. I was amazed that, after a lifetime of introspection and focus on personal development, I could be in a course in a formal academic setting that carried on my interest in philosophy and led to changes in how I taught, lived my life, and treated other people.

I carried EPP with me everywhere. I talked to strangers who caught a glimpse of the books I was reading for class. I spent considerable time discussing and thinking through course themes with friends. I challenged my students with similar discovery lessons based on phenomenological philosophy and research practices.

At the beginning of EPP, I engaged only as a student, but joined a research team studying phenomenology in education two thirds of the way through the course and became a participant observer. I continued to work with the Phenomenology and Existentialism in Education Research (PEER) group after the course ended, and through research for conference presentations and

posters and a course on learner-centered teaching in higher education, I found theoretical and philosophical language to describe what the course participants, including myself, experienced as unique.

One of the things that struck me was the course's *classroom climate*: it seemed that participants shared emotional personal stories and discussed alternate viewpoints without conflict. Students seemed to learn not only from the instructor, but also from other students. Through the subsequent research I did with PEER, I learned that I was not alone in my experience of engaging in *transformative learning* in the course. I present here a dissertation study with the EPP course as a setting in which I investigate the student experience of other students in EPP to see if, like there were for me, possible links between classroom climate, learning through others, and transformative learning.

In the tradition of phenomenological writing (van Manen, 2014), I have included in this paper personal examples where appropriate to assist the reader in becoming immersed in the topic. I share my personal experiences in an attempt to make real the purpose and goals of my dissertation study. In this chapter, I introduce the need for my study by examining the topic of student involvement in relation to transformative learning and classroom climate. I then share the purpose of the study with my research questions, how this dissertation fits in with other studies I am involved with, and this study's significance. I then discuss the limitations and delimitations of my work including positionality and rigor. Finally, I lay out the organization of the rest of the dissertation.

Tourists or Citizens

A recurring problem in teaching and learning is that students often fail to engage their entire being in the learning process. Freiburg (1999), a well-known researcher in the field of school and classroom climate noted, “too many students are ‘tourists’ passing through rather than ‘citizens,’ active learners in the classroom” (p. 4). Although he was commenting on the K-12 arena, similar issues face the realm of higher education (Johansson & Felten, 2014). Astin (1984) and Tinto (1997) have focused on the challenge of involvement and retention in higher education. They posit that the more citizen-like students are, the more likely they will finish degrees. It is in large part due to Astin’s and Tinto’s scholarship that colleges and universities attempt to keep students on campus or develop cohorts for commuter students. Students of medicine become residents to be fully immersed in their field and community colleges often create cohorts to encourage retention.

Johansson and Felten (2014), in response to concerns about school and classroom citizenry, describe the challenge of college students with a checklist mentality. Spurred by “credential inflation” (Collins, 2011), students see the credential (the college degree) as a determinant of economic mobility and little else. The proliferation of more and more specialized certificates or badges, attained by following a set of course requirements and workshops, can lead students to a view of college as an educational café, where portions of knowledge are dished out (Horton, 1998) and the credential gains primacy over learning skills and personal growth. In such an atmosphere, students and professors blame each other for the focus on attaining grades rather than pursuing learning (Pollio & Beck, 2000). To combat the checklist mentality and

shallow engagement, Johansson and Felten (2014) recommend that colleges provide more open learning opportunities, time for reflection, and integration of action into the curriculum.

The student-teacher grade orientation blame game (Pollio & Beck, 2000), like teacher-student interactions generally, dominates the classroom environment literature (see Rocca, 2010, for a relevant review of literature). Much less prevalent is the topic of student-student interaction. Student-student interactions, when encouraged or required by the professor, have been shown to increase self-reported participation (Fassinger, 1995; Weaver & Qi, 2005), are associated with student satisfaction with classroom climate (Ní Raghallaigh & Cunniffe, 2013), and correlated with higher class preparation and involvement (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). But few classroom climate studies directly examine the ways in which peers affect each other or learn from one another, whether in typical lecture courses or in seminars (a rare example is Galanes & Carmack, 2013).

Research on peer to peer learning often falls under the guise of group work. Various structured approaches to group work, like problem-based learning, have been shown to be successful for learning that goes beyond memorization (Weimer, 2013). But rarely is there a study of how, for example, a student contribution may take a class discussion, or even the entire course, in a new direction. Schwartz (1980) provides a rare example. In a social work course with a field component, students were empowered in an authentic way to drive course content. An angry comment from a student led to a modification in the power structure between students and the instructor. The kinds of learning gains in Weimer's (2013) review of reviews of literature on specific forms of group work, like retention of knowledge and improved problem-solving

abilities, hint in the direction of transformative learning. With one particular approach, Process-Oriented Guided Inquiry, peer learning is specifically implied: “students sa[id] that working through materials with other students help[ed] them understand the content better” (p. 45). But most of the study results she mentions focus on proxies for learning like grades, and they tell us little about how learners may or may not appropriate course content such that it affects their way of being and becoming in the world (Willis, 2012), an essential element of transformative learning.

Transformative learning.

The theory of transformative learning (Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Taylor, Cranton, & Associates, 2012) is a theory of learning and development first described by Mezirow (1978) as a change in meaning perspective brought on by a disorienting dilemma. Through critical reflection, dialogue, and action, adults “transform problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). For Mezirow, “problematic” frames of reference included views on democracy, love, and citizenship. For the purposes of this study, I also draw on a more recent definition of transformative learning from N. Greenberg, K. Greenberg, Patterson, and Pollio, (2015): “students change from merely *knowing* course content to *realizing* its relevance in their personal and professional lives” (emphasis original, Introduction section, para. 1). Realization, in this case, refers to the potential for learners to have an experience with content that goes beyond traditional notions of transfer. To *realize* content is for a student to put its unique characteristics into his or her way of being in the world. Transformative learning has also been characterized as

an appropriation of course content and an intertwining of course content and the life of the learner (Franklin et al., 2014).

Taylor (2009), perhaps the foremost living scholar in the field, described conditions that foster transformative learning. These include six “core elements”: individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and an authentic practice. These elements are interrelated. For example, since adults have more individual experience in life, there is more material for critical reflection. Taylor identified three areas of fostering transformative learning that need more research: student responsibility in the transformative learning process, relational ways of knowing, and how intimacy, trust, and empathy relate to transformative learning. Scholars of transformative learning talk more of “fostering transformative learning” than they do of classroom climate due to the broadness of their field (much transformative learning takes place outside the classroom setting, see Taylor & Cranton, 2012). But in this dissertation classroom climate is taken as an aspect of fostering transformative learning.

Classroom climate.

“Classroom climate” is a ubiquitous term known by educators and the public. A Google search with keywords “classroom climate” returns around 4.4 million items. Common understanding of the concept is revealed by the following pieces of advice for teachers from a popular educational psychology text (Ormrod, 2014): “Establish a goal-oriented, businesslike, yet nonthreatening atmosphere...Communicate and demonstrate that school tasks...have value...Promote a general sense of community and belongingness” (pp. 428-429). The clear assumption of these directives is that teachers have the ability to be the primary influence on the

climate of their classrooms. While I make no argument otherwise, particularly in the K-12 setting, I find it important to illuminate common conceptions of classroom climate to ensure that, if indeed I find that students have little to do with classroom climate, it is not because I am repeating a trope.

In academic settings, classroom climate has been referred to as the psychosocial climate, the social emotional climate, the psychological atmosphere, the pedagogical atmosphere, the psychosocial milieu, and the classroom environment. Almost any enclosed space we walk into can have an atmosphere, ambiance, or feel. It seems that classrooms, at least in educational circles, are most often said to have climates. The classroom environment often refers to the physical, rather than psychological, social, or pedagogical climate. I will use the term classroom climate.

Saldern (1992), in a discussion of the meteorological origin of the term climate, noted that weather can change daily, but climate refers to long-term patterns. For Saldern, the problem with the term classroom climate is that it reduces the psycho-social atmosphere to a specific institutional function (the classroom) and fails to make it clear that the classroom is a socio-psychological unit like any other in a different context (p. 5). But classrooms are embedded in particular institutions (schools, colleges, universities). That Moos (1974) has shown through psychometric studies that many institutions have “social climates” that “can be measured” using a single theoretical framework cannot overshadow the different kinds of experiences one might have going from a psychiatric ward to a college seminar. Yet Moos’ approach is still common in classroom climate research (e.g., Corkin, Lu, Wolters, & Wiesner, 2014).

In one of its first definitions, Withall (1949) referred to the interactions between students and between students and teacher as the social emotional climate:

A general emotional factor which appears to be present in interactions occurring between individuals in face-to-face groups. It seems to have some relationship to the degree of acceptance expressed by members of a group regarding each other's needs or goals. Operationally defined, it is considered to influence: (1) the inner private world of each individual; (2) the esprit de corps of a group; (3) the sense of meaningfulness of group and individual goals and activities; (4) the objectivity with which a problem is attacked; and (5) the kind and extent of interpersonal interaction in a group. (Withall, 1949, p. 348).

Withall's thorough definition brings together the individuals and the group with a focus on the internal, the in-between, and the external. However, the technicality of his divisions are overly scientific for an existential phenomenological perspective. Students and teacher alike can experience classroom climate idiosyncratically: as in any place, the atmosphere is often simply the background upon which other experiences take place. Non-phenomenological studies of classroom climate call participant attention to comment on what might otherwise go unnoticed. A phenomenological approach to classroom climate must take into account that students find aspects of the classroom experience figural within a context. And the context of adult students is one of extensive experience in classrooms. With these considerations in mind, I define the classroom climate as the participant-constructed first-person experience of the context of a course. This may include their own sense of unity or disunity associated with *esprit de corps*, it

may include the sense of meaning of course activities, and, most relevant for this study, it may include the experience of other students that share the classroom space.

The construct of classroom climate should also emphasize the importance of emotions (Boler, 1999) and the socially constructed nature (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) of classroom climate. It is important to me to include thoughts, emotions, and felt sense of a course experience when discussing the classroom climate as opposed to considering degrees of consensus on Likert-scale ratings forms. Saldern (1992) offers a look at such techniques and goes so far as to say that classroom climate is defined by what students in a classroom perceive commonly. Elements of disagreement are considered signs of a poor classroom climate.

The fields of classroom climate and transformative learning can be enhanced by a phenomenological study of the student experience of other students (SEOS) with the EPP course as a setting. Students in EPP were involved, by measures generally associated with Astin's theory like attendance (the attendance rate was 79%, and excluding the two students who were enrolled in the course for the second time, attendance was 87%) and active participation in class (there was a 95% participation rate¹) and preparation outside of it. In EPP no assignments were graded, and the course did not "count" towards a credential. No graduate certificates or research hours requirements could be filled. Students in EPP learned in a manner that could be labeled transformative (Franklin et al., 2014; Sohn et al., 2016).

¹ This rate was calculated by noting the percentage of students present who spoke up in whole-class discussions at least once during a class session.

Purpose

I teach a required educational psychology course in a teacher education program. One semester, after a few weeks of class, I was struggling: most students were not engaged, my lessons seemed to be falling flat, and I noticed eye rolling on a regular basis. Then two students did a presentation in which they taught some of the material through a poem they wrote. One of the presenters said, “I don’t know about you all, but this is going to be my career and I want it to be *fun*.” The poem rhymed, sometimes awkwardly, which made it silly, yet it was focused on content. Students laughed as they read it, but then they analyzed and discussed how they could apply the content in their future work. The presenters’ peers praised the poem and the originality of the presentation, as if they were surprised that learning educational psychology could be such fun. After that project presentation, the class members had a new attitude towards the course, its content, and the activities. The climate of the class seemed to have changed dramatically due to the contributions of those two students.

This experience opened questions for me. As the instructor I had the impression that the project changed the classroom climate, but I was not privy to the perspective of the students. The purpose of this study is to better understand the student experience of other students (SEOS) and find what stands out to them. I use these findings to discuss classroom climate and transformative learning with an interdisciplinary approach that includes empirical and philosophical research.

Research Question.

When the fields of transformative learning and classroom climate are viewed together, there appears to be a lack of research on the SEOS in the classroom, and whether or not such experiences lead to transformative learning. That brings me to my research question: What is the meaning of the student experience of other students in what could be classified as a learner-centered course? The empirical study within this dissertation will take on that question, and the discussion will explore the implications of the SEOS for transformative learning, classroom climate, and philosophy of education.

Prior Studies.

Having been part of the Phenomenology and Existentialism in Education Research (PEER) group for four years, in this section I will describe what research has been done and how this study is different. In the Spring semester of 2012 I conducted a general phenomenological analysis of one set of data, the post-class reflections (for details on data sources, see Chapter 3: Methodology). In this analysis I found at least one theme that overlaps with the current study's findings: that of "Seeing Variations." I was also involved with a process of selecting episodes from the class sessions to be transcribed for further analysis. I used my knowledge of what stood out to students based on the post-class reflections to help two other participant observers of the course decide whether or not segments of class sessions would be transcribed. There was no overlap between the type of work done on episode selection and the current study. One product of this work was a type of critical incident reflection (Dellard & Greenberg, 2014) that analyzed an instructor exchange with two students in terms of teaching and learning.

PEER members, including myself, worked on analysis of the class as a whole. I helped write a manuscript (Sohn et al., 2016) that presented the thematic structure of the overall experience of the students in the course based on individual interviews. One of the subthemes of the structure, “Connection and Collaboration,” directly overlaps with the work of this study, as it had to do with student experience of other students. So while Sohn et al. hinted at the importance of SEOS, my work goes deeper and examines it more specifically, drawing as it does on data sources other than the individual interviews. I have presented preliminary analysis of this dissertation study data (Sohn, 2015), the framework for its recommendations (Sohn, 2016) and its methods (Sohn & Skutnik, 2014). I refer to these studies when appropriate.

Other work by PEER is of a theoretical nature regarding phenomenological pedagogy and transformative learning. While my focus here is not related directly to how the course was taught, if the course had been taught in another way the study would not be possible. Franklin’s (2013) dissertation study within PEER focused on the planning practices of the instructor. Franklin’s work serves as an important reference in my discussion. The theoretical work on transformative learning (Franklin et al., 2014; N. Greenberg, K. Greenberg, Patterson, & Pollio, 2015) served as preparation for many important areas of the discussion presented in Chapter 5.

Significance.

There are large bodies of literature on classroom climate and transformative learning, but this study will focus specifically on their overlap, with a basis in the empirically derived experience of the student-participants.

In the field of transformative learning, not enough is known about the role of student-student relationships (Taylor, 2007). While there has been research on qualities of transformative relationships (Eisen, 2001; Giles, 2011) these studies tend to focus on rationality or extra-or non-rational domains of learning. Both of these kinds of transformative learning are “in the head” and not so much in the world. This study contributes directly to generating knowledge about student-student relationships in the existential manner called for by Willis (2012). Another lack in the field of transformative learning is a sense of how students progress from more superficial or accumulative learning to learning that is deeply changing. This study, thanks to the longitudinal data from beginning to end of the course, provides a picture of just such a progression. The only similar finding in transformative learning is a typology of learners (as summarized in Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

This phenomenological case study will contribute to classroom climate research with its unique focus on how students experience their peers and so construct the classroom climate. Typical classroom climate research uses survey instruments that, while designed to measure student perceptions (Fraser, 2012), fail to help educators realize the meaning of classroom climate for students. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge generated in higher education classroom climate research by helping instructors see what it is like for students to experience other students in a course.

As designed, this study will have a slightly broader intent than giving the reader a sense of the phenomenon, even as generally stated, “the student experience of others in a course.” Learning about how and whether or not students focus on specific kinds of contributions can

help justify or undermine instructional practices like the ones used in the EPP course and others that similarly place greater responsibility on the students than a lecture and test course format. The students felt some sense of freedom in the course (Sohn et al., 2016), and so in Chapters 2 and 5, I discuss freedom in education.

Limitations

Some limitations of a qualitative research project are inherent in the process (Fischer, 2006). The data for this project come from a single class composed of particular students at a particular university at a particular moment in time. The relevance of these data to other people in other places at other times is subject to resonance (Piantanida & Garman, 2009): will seeing the data and my interpretation of the texts help a reader see classroom climate and transformative learning in a way that provides insight (van Manen, 2014)? If so, will it inspire a change in habits? Phenomenological case studies inhabit a difficult space: with a gestalt orientation focused on interconnectedness and association of parts to the whole, causality is, if not rejected, at least complicated. Yet the goal of this research is to make an impact on the practice of teachers and students by stating the phenomenological essence of SEOS, and to assert that lessons can be learned is difficult to do without assuming that a particular teacher or student practice may influence a certain result.

Many researchers, qualitative or quantitative, claim a kind of neutrality, but whether they say “correlation does not equal causation” or “I make no claims beyond the current case,” the point of writing up a report of research is to present a kind of moral of the story that readers can use to help them view the world in a more sophisticated or knowledgeable way. With

phenomenology, what the reports can do is provide a window into how the phenomenon is experienced by participants. This view is generally ignored in the field of education. To re-apply a metaphor from Broderick and Ne'eman (2008), students “are generally offstage characters, referred to constantly, invoked with great passion and pomp, but not fit to offer any actual lines of dialogue” (p. 471). In this study the voices of the students and their experiences of other students are central.

But when the offstage characters are given the only voice, what is lost is another view of the phenomenon that could be achieved with either statistical measures or ethnographic rich descriptions. One example of observable data is attendance records. Often measures of attendance act as proxies for student involvement in a course. But phenomenologists focus on meaning, and showing up to class is different than being mindfully present in it. In this phenomenological case study, I use both types of data to characterize the case.

As the researcher, who I am and what I am capable of is a limitation on the research. In phenomenology, a common practice for increasing transparency and rigor is bracketing (See Chapter 3 for a full discussion). As a participant in the larger PEER case study and as a member of the research team, bracketing is particularly important. In this dissertation, I will refer to myself in the third person as “Brian” when discussing my data from the case study, and use the first person “I” as my authorial voice. The results of my bracketing exercises help illustrate my positionality within this study. While the introduction and other areas of the dissertation bring to light some elements of my positionality, I specifically turn to my bracketing exercise results in the following section. Themes from my findings are in italics.

Results of bracketing.

In my bracketing interview, there were two themes that can help the reader understand the perspectives I brought to my study. *There were a “bunch of people” sharing stories and perspectives in a banquet-like atmosphere.* For me the high number of students who participated relative to other courses I was in was something that stood out. In the bracketing interview I recalled that Lois (all participant names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms) described the course as a banquet. For me that spoke to the different backgrounds of the participants, their intelligence, and how getting those people together was fun because of the intellectual stimulation. With this in mind I watched carefully for confirmation bias from other participants in my analysis and note some of the exceptions explicitly in sections below. *Some students stood out more than others.* This was clear in that I could remember certain participants in the study including things they said in class and their general demeanor. There were other participants I could not remember—not their faces or anything they said in class sessions, despite having examined the data off and on for four years.

In my individual bracketing, which included descriptions of what I could remember about each participant in the class, I found I essentialized participants in categories in a way that I sometimes found petty. I would note things like if a participant was absent a lot. For example Steven was absent eight times. I noted that George was so heartfelt that he rarely laughed. Ben was the “jock.” Barbara was the “music woman.” I attempted in my bracketing to trace these essentializations as I listened to the class session audio and read through the post-class reflections, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. For Barbara, she stated in the first

class session that her husband was the director of the local symphony orchestra and used musical metaphors in class and in her post-class reflections. In my analysis I made sure to allow individuals to “be more” than the categories I assigned to them, and bracketing helped me in that process.

Considering the importance of classroom climate to this study, its centrality in my bracketing interview, and how the EPP course influenced my practice as a graduate instructor, I thought it necessary to bracket in relation to classroom climate. From this exercise I found the following important elements of my positionality. *I considered EPP’s climate ideal.* In the courses I taught, I started including lengthy first-day introductions as a standard practice, as the instructor did in EPP. I began using phenomenological questions in class to help students recall personal stories relevant to the content of the course, or as the instructor called the practice, “launching a world” (Franklin, 2013). *I considered EPP’s climate to be different from other courses.* I do not experience every class like a banquet. Other participants’ stories were central in my experience of EPP, so I made sure to provide time in the classes I taught to hear individuals’ perspectives. In EPP, these were stories students could hold up as examples rather than necessarily fixed elements of their identity. With these themes in mind, I maintained a stance of openness to who the students were, what and how they discussed their experience of other students, and how they felt about the course generally.

Rigor.

My dissertation is a text (Piantanida & Garman, 2009) containing subjective portrayals of subjective voices that requires readers to bring to bear their subjectivity in judging the validity of

my claims. What I attempt to ensure is a level of transparency (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). Conducting my analysis in MAXQDA left a mental paper trail (Konopasek, 2008), of sorts, such that anyone—if they examine the transcripts, my bracketing interview and statement, codes, memos, research journal, and results—can follow my lines of reasoning.

In the end, I coded over 2600 segments of text, made around 200 memos, listened multiple times to over 25 hours of audio-recorded data, and read and re-read over 400 pages of field notes and transcripts of audio-recorded data.

Delimitations

In case studies, boundaries and lines must be drawn to define the case (Stake, 2000). The phenomenon under study is the experience of others in EPP. No other courses are specifically included. General discussion of student experience in the course is excluded. Discussion of the professor is excluded unless made relevant in relation to other students.

Phenomenological case studies (e.g., Franklin, 2013) blur the lines of division between intrinsic and instrumental cases as described by Stake (2000). As an intrinsic case, I am interested in the particular phenomenon as experienced by the students, but one of the intentions of phenomenology is to help readers interpret what may be universal about a phenomenon (van Manen, 2014), which is the intent of instrumental cases.

The purpose of this study is to understand the SEOS in the EPP course. Typically educational research presumes that the professor establishes the classroom climate, and that allows for the student interactions. Without the instructor's openness to student participation the kinds of student interactions that occurred in EPP would be unlikely to occur. But I am not

focusing on the professor's actions directly in this course, since that has been the focus of another study (Franklin, 2013) and other related PEER projects (Franklin et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 2015; Sohn et al., 2016).

The manner in which students affect each other may have to do with the unwritten rules of graduate students, the sociology of student-practitioners, or the culture of the academy, but in this study I focus only on what is reconstructed in student accounts and what I reconstruct in relation to them, rather than impose a formalist theory on the data from the beginning. The data is either centered around the immediate experience (post-class reflections) or reflection on the course as a whole (focus group and individual interviews).

My analysis will be bounded by the traditions of phenomenology and philosophy of education. Phenomenology is limited to the participants' reconstructions of their experience, along with mine, since I was part of the course. Philosophy of education often relies on a process of logical normative argumentation (Thayer-Bacon & Moyer, 2006), which I adapt to my purposes in Chapters 2 and 5.

Organization

In this dissertation I detail a study that contributes to my practice as an instructor and the broader literature on transformative learning, classroom climate, and learning through others. In the review of literature, I begin by examining transformative learning theory and then discuss classroom climate research with the work of certain philosophers of education that discuss relationships, classroom climate, and/or highlight the need for peer influence on classroom

climate for transformative learning to occur. In Chapter 3, I present my methodology. In Chapter 4, I present the results of the study, and finally discuss them and their significance in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 1, I described the need for my study and contextualized it within theoretical frameworks and the larger research project of which it is a part. My research examines a situation in which students in a higher education setting are more deeply engaged in their studies and they learn in a way that is transformative: they realize, or make real and embody, the course content in their personal and professional lives. Many researchers focus on what instructors can do to foster transformative learning, but the role students play in each other's learning and classroom experience is less well understood. My study examines the student experience of other students (SEOS) to address this deficiency.

There is a lack of research in higher education settings that focuses on student-student experiences and relationships. But the course that is the setting of this study, Existential Phenomenological Psychology (EPP) was one in which the instructor shared his authority, joined in with students to learn, and did not hold a monopoly on helping the (adult) students learn (Franklin, 2013; N. Greenberg et al., 2015; Sohn et al., 2016). With the diffusion of the authority and traditional roles of the instructor, it is relevant to include in this review research that focuses on teacher-student relationships or the role of the instructor in fostering transformative learning or creating the classroom climate. In the EPP course, student-student relationships could at times be recast as teacher-student relationships.

In this chapter I contextualize my study by describing three areas of educational research that relate to student-student interaction: transformative learning, philosophy of education, and classroom climate. The three areas of this review of literature overlap in pointing to empirical,

philosophical, and theoretical knowledge regarding teaching and learning among students. Within transformative learning theory, scholars have found empirically that peer relationships matter in adult learning settings (Taylor, 2007). The philosophy of education within this review was selected for its focus on relational learning and issues like safety and risk. The settings of studies in the area of transformative learning range from higher education to community centers, and so the concept of fostering transformative learning is bigger than my classroom focus. But classroom climate is an aspect of fostering transformative learning (Taylor, 2009), and students in higher education settings are adults, so there is instructive research in that area as well, and general research on classroom climate is included here, particularly when relevant to the interactions of students or their perceptions of each other.

Philosophers of education often present how education *should be done*, or normative arguments. One value of considering such arguments is to contextualize empirical work: with the goal of a particular classroom climate, research can be critiqued without putting all faith in numbers from quantitative research or interviews and observations from qualitative research. Just as philosophy of education can be used to contextualize empirical work, certain kinds of empirical work can be used to contextualize philosophy. I seek to understand how our best representations of reality as we know it compare to stated ideals.

In the next section I detail the search processes I used to find the literature. I then summarize some history of transformative learning including its roots and first critiques, and then present relevant studies related to the student experience of other students (SEOS). After that I weave theory, philosophy of education, and empirical studies regarding SEOS and the role

of the instructor, noting how some of the research regarding teacher-student relationships can clearly help us understand the potential for student-student relationships in learner-centered courses. Based on this literature, in the end I present my research questions.

The Search for Literature

My goals in the search process were to explore the empirical, theoretical and philosophical histories of classroom climate and transformative learning and to identify empirical studies on classroom climate that were linked to various outcomes. I wanted to delimit my search in a way that did not eliminate work that would be important for my understanding without being overwhelmed. For example, within the vast literature on group work much has been said about peer learning, but the course I studied used group work minimally, so I did not include it. With the work in philosophy, I excluded scholars such as Pestalozzi, who wrote specifically about children, because my study focused on adult learning.

In preliminary searches, I used the following databases: Google Scholar, ERIC, and Education Source. I used the Education Source thesaurus to find the most appropriate search terms. For “classroom climate,” the synonym was “classroom environment.” I extended my search by including key journals such as *Learning Environments Research* and the *Journal of Higher Education*. In order to ensure I found philosophical works, I used the Philosopher’s Index database and searched the journals *Educational Theory* and *Educational Studies*. I discussed the topic with scholars at The University of Tennessee and elsewhere to solicit specific recommendations for my reading list.

After initial readings of abstracts and reference sections, I found names of key authors and articles. I found books that were mentioned in numerous studies and read key chapters. In subsequent searches I used more key terms from the literature: e.g. risk-taking, disclosure, relationships, care, and confirmation, among others. I used the Web of Science citation search engine in a kind of “snowball sampling” to find articles that had cited the key articles. Through these search methods I found the literature reviewed below. I begin with transformative learning.

Transformative Learning

As introduced in Chapter 1, transformative learning is a dominant theory in the field of adult learning and development that has been well explored by practitioners and researchers (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Mezirow (1978) found the dominant model of adult education at the time incomplete, restrictive, and too focused on observable behavior:

Educational objectives are set in terms of specific behaviors....The current performance level...is ascertained, and...compared with the level...established as necessary. The shortfall...is divided into a number of educational exercises...to be mastered in sequence and with instant feedback....Finally, education is evaluated by subtracting measured learning gains in competencies from the behavioral objectives (p. 107).

With influences from Paulo Freire’s concept of *conscientização*, Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm shift, Jerome Bruner’s decentration, and Roger Gould’s theory of adult transformation, Mezirow departed from the old, behavior-focused model. His theory was based on the results of a major study of women returning to higher education (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). The women

had a “perspective transformation,” a constructivist conceptualization that focused on internal dialogue, rational self-reflection, and changes in action students made in their lives.

More than a matter of meeting pre-designated objectives, the perspective changes he noticed in non-traditional female students had “dimensions of thought, feeling, and will” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 105). The perspective transformation process was initiated by a kind of “disorienting” event in the life of the adult and progressed from there in a series of ten phases (not intended as sequential steps). These events or processes included dialogue, critical reflection, and practice. An important note for this dissertation is that in the early days of transformative learning theory development, Mezirow emphasized the importance of a supportive “social climate” where student failures involved “minimum risk” (p. 107). There was no declaration that the instructor must take full responsibility for creating this climate.

Mezirow (1981, 2000) broadened the concept of a perspective transformation over the years. He adopted a framework in which perspectives, or frames of reference, were broken down into habits of mind, or meaning perspectives, and points of view, or meaning schemes. Points of view are general expectations related to specific situations. Habits of mind are more closely tied to epistemological assumptions (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Transformative learning can describe changes to either or both points of view and habits of mind.

Mezirow’s work inspired much debate and further research. His conception of transformative learning was too narrow for many in adult education who saw the role of the adult educator as tied more closely to broad social change rather than change within individuals.

Transformative learning theory has been broadened to more fully reflect the empirical work done with transformative learning as a framework (Taylor, 2007).

Evolution of transformative learning.

Collard and Law (1989) described theirs as the first published critique of Mezirow's theory. In it they criticized transformative learning for failing to provide an explanation of how broad social changes occur. For them, Mezirow's theory was tied too strongly to the idea of incremental social change through the reform of individuals. Clark and Wilson (1991) followed Collard and Law's (1989) critique with continued focus on the individual and the sociocultural context: Mezirow did not pay enough attention to the contextual factors in individuals' lives. Clark and Wilson (1991) argued, "The elements of a meaning perspective that Mezirow finds distortive and seeks to correct through transformation, we find constitutive of meaning and therefore crucial for interpreting experience" (p. 76). Some of the "distortive" elements, according to Mezirow (1981), were the relationships in the lives of the students.

Other scholars in the field of adult learning critiqued Mezirow's work for being too rational and orderly. Dirkx (2001), for example, does not rely on rationalism, metacognitive processes, or disorienting dilemmas to explain transformative learning.

Transformative learning does not necessarily require extraordinary events in our lives, nor does it always require that we think deeply and analytically about our beliefs and assumptions. Dramatic opportunities of transformative learning reside in imaginative engagement with the everydayness of our lives....(p. 16)

Dirkx described imaginative engagement as “soul work” that involves emotion identification and attempts to connect the conscious and unconscious selves of learners (Dirkx, 2001). Mezirow and Dirkx theorize other students in the course as part of a safe atmosphere in which individual students pursue deep changes. Mezirow (2009) posits a group of people with which students can have rational conversations to determine the best possible solution to a disorienting dilemma. Dirkx (2001) envisions students being kind to each other as they wrestle internally. Neither of these scholars theorizes specifically on how students affect each other’s transformative learning progress. It is as if, for Dirkx and Mezirow, the majority of the people around the learner are not involved or, at best, tangentially involved, in transformative learning.

But there are other scholars within the field of transformative learning that have focused closely on topics related to SEOS: fostering transformative learning, of which classroom climate is a part, and the role of relationships in transformative learning.

Relationships and transformative learning.

As empirical work that relied on transformative learning theory became more common, aspects of the theory were broadened (Taylor, 1997, 2000, 2007), particularly in regard to the individualistic elements of transformative learning. Many of these modifications aligned with the early critiques (Clark & Wilson 1991; Collard & Law, 1989). Relationships were not simply something to overcome or to be used as a means to develop rational discourse—they were critical in supporting the learner through the challenges of transformation. Among the most common findings in studies of transformative learning were trust, friendship, and support. These

aspects of relationships, if fostered, may support transformative learning (Taylor, 2007). What is often neglected is specific mention of student-student relationships.

Fostering transformative learning. How adult educators foster transformative learning has been a central issue of discussion for over twenty years (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor & Cranton, 2012), and one aspect of this research is the practice of dialogue (Mezirow, 2009; Taylor, 2007, 2009). Dialogue with others requires relationships. Transformative learning in its early form saw relationships from a liberal rationalist perspective that defined family and former relations as necessarily restrictive and conditioning. Relations were to become more “contractual” through the process of perspective transformation. Old relations were shed or transformed in order for the learner to pursue reciprocal and egalitarian relations with people engaged in similar existential projects (Mezirow, 1981). Students could be engaged with each other in the pursuit of being better selves in educational settings. The idea of autonomy presented with these relations was one of awakening, rational, critical thinkers who saw their conditioned ways of being in the world caused by unequal and potentially oppressive relationships. Ideally they broke those relationships and engaged in “critical discourse” with other students and the instructor (Mezirow, 1989).

But early empirical work in transformative learning highlighted the need to look more carefully at what Taylor (1997) referred to as “connected ways of knowing” (p. 49), a phrase borrowed from Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s (1986) *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (WWK). Belenky and Stanton (2000) review the findings of WWK and share a typology of types of learners they assert can be used as a “road map” to help guide instructors in their quest to help

students gain more sophisticated ways of knowing. As with most of the literature in transformative learning, they cast their knowers in relation with an instructor or authority rather than focus on connected knowing that might occur between students in a classroom.

More recent conceptions of transformative learning challenge Mezirow's view further. Relationships may be problematic and oppressive in situations where one person wields power over another, but they also facilitate the process of transformative learning. In one example, Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) work used interviews with 22 professors over three years to develop theory regarding teacher perspectives on authenticity. They used grounded theory methods because their topic, teacher authenticity, had little to no theoretical development. Grounded theory can be powerful in this regard, and they had a relatively large and diverse set of participants. The drawback to grounded theory is that the constructs and categories created at times can quash nuance and subtlety.

The most common topic of conversation in the interviews was relationships with students. They concluded:

A person who is more aware of relationships between teacher and student is more likely to care for students, be concerned with helping them to learn, and engage in dialogue with students. He or she is more likely to share aspects of the self with students, be conscious of how power is exercised, and have considered the degree of personal connection with students that is comfortable. These characteristics describe authenticity in teaching. And here, we would add that the relationship includes fostering students' authenticity. (p. 20)

For Cranton (2006), authentic relationships are transformative because authenticity is defined as a process in which personal values and personal actions are aligned. She does not speculate if authenticity among students could also lead to transformative learning. I recast some of her ideas in that vein below.

Cranton (2006) presents three models of teacher authenticity. *Closeness* was exemplified by “Kathy,” a self-labeled “mother duck” who arranged day care for students, welcomed them into her office at any time, and had them over for Thanksgiving dinner if they were away from home. Students could fulfill similar roles: in an example from my college experience, I had Thanksgiving dinner with other students who did not go to their parents’ homes. The second model, *collegiality*, was illustrated by “Bob,” who worked alongside his students and shared jokes, stories, and sometimes after class, a beer. It is not difficult to imagine students sharing a beer after (or even during) a study session. For the third model, *respectful distance*, Cranton described “Tang-Mei,” who maintained professional relations with her students and encouraged them to question the underlying premises of technology use in education. Students can provide instrumental, academic support to one another. Within a classroom student perspectives could help other students question underlying premises of any topic.

Cranton acknowledged that there are many more than three models for authentic instructor-student relationships, but she does not speculate as to whether or not her models for such relationships could possibly transfer to authentic student-student relationships. She focused on the idea that instructors must make their frames of reference with which they view students permeable to allow for student differences to be effective catalysts for transformative learning in

a quest towards authenticity. Students as well would be served to not categorize each other superficially. PEER's study of the student experience as a learner in EPP points to the importance of not only instructor authenticity, but student authenticity as well (Sohn et al., 2016).

Peer relationships in transformative learning. Peer relationships among instructors have been found to foster transformative learning. Eisen (2001) investigated a peer learning program for nursing instructors with a qualitative case study methodology. She examined documents from the peer learning program, analyzed 20 participant interviews, and critical incident essays written by participants. This kind of triangulation is typically an attempt to increase the trustworthiness of results. To that same end, she also used a kind of theme-development audit in her analysis.

She found that the most successful partnerships were founded on trust and egalitarianism. To foster transformative learning, she said, "the most obvious ingredient is having one or more trusted partners with whom to dialogue" (p. 40). As Taylor (2007) noted, "It is through trustful relationships that allow individuals to have questioning discussions, share information openly and achieve mutual and consensual understanding" (p. 179). Sohn et al. (2016) also found that trust and egalitarianism were part of the experience of learners who realized course content in their lives. Eisen's (2001) study, while focused on instructors rather than students, shows the importance of building relationships between learners.

In two qualitative studies that focused on relationships, classroom climate, and transformative learning, Langan, Sheese, and Davidson (2009) and Walton (2010) attempted to build genuine relationships and trust between students in courses with controversial content.

Langan et al. (2009), in collaboration with tutorial assistants (TAs), designed a classroom climate for a sociology class that was meant to foster transformative learning regarding structural inequalities in gender, race, class, ability, age, and sexual preference (p. 46). In both studies the instructors created small groups that worked closely throughout the semester so the students had time to get to know each other. In a communications course, Walton (2010) used content designed to challenge deeply held assumptions about freedom, democracy, and religion. Langan, Oliver, and Atkinson (2007), in a case study taken from their larger participatory feminist action research project, highlight TA and student reactions to specific “disruptions” that were intended to create disorienting dilemmas. For example, one of the disruptions was a talk from an activist sex worker who described her work as emancipatory rather than objectifying and victimizing.

Student reaction to this guest lecture was very emotional, and one TA reported that she became angry due to the anger of students. The reactions to this small-group conversation from students, at minimum, shows that students felt bad and desired reconciliation. In one example, a student wrote,

I do not hold any grudge or even a bad impression of you [the TA]. I believe that you have been a wonderful leader and have made a lot of difference...I hope that this instance does not affect the way you view me either. I would like to leave this course knowing that the relationships made in tutorial are not harmed in any way and that I have not offended you...and if I have, I am sorry. The discussion today was heated, and if I could do it all over again, I would be more clear on my position and cautious of my actions. (Langan, Oliver, & Atkinson, 2007, para. 25)

A more generous interpretation is that here is a case where relationships were the safety that allowed for course participants to have a discussion so heated that apologies were called for. In the case above students did not change their frame of reference in regards to sex work, but another kind of transformation took place: the view of learning and how relationships mattered more than test scores. As one student put it, “In the end, it’s not what facts you were able to throw onto a test, but instead, it’s the experience you got out of it as a whole” (Langan et al., 2009, p. 54).

The methods of Langan et al. (2007) included data collection of course documents and artifacts, interviews with students and TAs, and reflections from the designers of the course, the TAs, and students. With such a plethora of data, the potential for cherry picking passages to support a point would be easy. Yet they include critique of their project, course, and even shed doubt on the effectiveness of their methods based on collected data (Langan et al., 2009). But while they may not have found success in terms of triggering the kind of transformative learning they intended, which was to help students change the way they saw the world towards a more feminist perspective, the evidence they present does show the value and transformative power of intentional encouragement of student-student and student-TA relationships.

Walton’s (2010) study used constant comparative analysis and found that students appreciated their warm and genuine interactions and described their group work as non-argumentative despite the differing viewpoints shared. Some participants noted the increased amount of listening other students did and that led to more sharing. Students reported various degrees of transformative learning from changes in points of view to changes in habits of mind.

One student remarked, “my view of the world is a bit different now...spending time with my group and talking about sensitive topics has given me insight on the way people actually see the world” (Walton, 2010, p. 163).

This appreciation, or at minimum, awareness of diverse views helped students think in new ways about civic issues. Many students described changes in meaning schemes and perspectives. Walton noted that students’ “normative, privileged descriptions of class structure” (p. 164) became more nuanced and complex. One student revised her understanding of the United States as a democracy: she began the course as “a total defender of democracy....I think some [here]...would like to make our country socialist” and later wrote, “I guess that just because someone uses the term ‘democracy’ doesn’t mean that it really is one” (p. 167). Another student, described as a debater, revised her understanding of group dialogue:

Group dialogue is harder than it seems. There is a need to respect others’ views and really get into the issues...not just defend and contest them. When you put effort into listening to other people, it gives you a chance to evaluate your beliefs too...It’s [debate] not good for...finding commonalities and it doesn’t necessarily respect others’ positions either (p. 168).

Walton viewed these changes as possible only in the context of the supportive classroom climate, but the highly delineated nature of the findings, a typical product of the cutting and chopping required by constant comparative analysis, does not give the reader a unified sense of the experience of this particular course for students, and so whether or not transformative learning occurred *because of* the classroom climate, as Walton claims, is not clear. But his results

are similar to some of the case study findings reported by the Phenomenology and Existentialism in Education Research group (PEER) (Franklin et al., 2014; Sohn et al., 2016). Students experience changes in perspective when allowed to comfortably and non-competitively share differing viewpoints.

The Franklin et al. (2014) and Sohn et al. (2016) study used phenomenological methods developed at the University of Tennessee (Thomas & Pollio, 2002) to examine the experience of learners in a graduate seminar taught by an experienced instructor. Their inquiry did not begin in the field of transformative learning, but student responses to questions like, “Tell me about being a learner in this course” included statements such as, “this course gave me a different way to look at the world,” and “I’m in the subject, I’m a part of it...I’m helping to create it, and it’s helping to create me...” led there. Phenomenology has been criticized for relying too heavily on interviews (Potter & Hepburn, 2005), but this critique comes from a post-structural paradigm. It focuses on the many ways interviewers lead participants, and leading is systematically avoided in the Franklin et al. and Sohn et al. research.

In relation to transformative learning through relationships, in the field of moral psychology, Haidt (2001) found that people are much more likely to move beyond their initial gut reactions and change their minds regarding moral issues if a trusted peer encourages them to do so. The implications for trusting relationships in transformative learning in a classroom setting are clear—if the teacher allows students to help each other move towards changes in perspective, they are more likely to experience authentic changes in perspective rather than perform those changes for the sake of getting a high grade.

One of the major weaknesses I found in transformative learning research is that disagreement exists as to what kind of learning qualifies as transformative. So many studies take on transformative learning as an a priori theoretical framework and based on interviews categorize and qualify student statements as transformative or not. Yet the a priori framework could easily influence interview protocols and data collection. Few studies describe methodology in enough detail to know what steps are taken to bracket or avoid leading participants in what they discuss.

Taylor (2007) called for more research into specific aspects of relationships as they relate to fostering transformative learning: intimacy, trust, and empathy (p. 188). He said that “developing an authentic practice is significant for fostering trusting relationships between learners and teacher, which often provides the safe environment for learners to engage in critical reflection, ultimately allowing transformative learning to take place” (Taylor, 2009, p. 4). But here Taylor neglected the potential for students within a course to form such trusting relationships, as studied in Langan et al. (2007) and Walton (2010), described in Haidt (2001), and what this dissertation and other research from the PEER addresses directly (Franklin et al., 2014; Sohn et al., 2016). In the next section, I broaden this literature review to the fields of classroom climate and philosophy of education. Classroom climate is a construct of interest because it relates to fostering transformative learning. Yet fostering transformative learning implies that the instructor is who fosters. Classroom climate takes into account other students in the process.

Classroom Climate and Philosophy of Education

In this section I bring empirical research on classroom climate into conversation with philosophy of education. I begin with a brief history of classroom climate research, with its origin in the social philosophy of Kurt Lewin (1939). I trace the progression of classroom climate research to Hall and Sandler's (1982) influential and controversial report on the "chilly" climate for women in higher education. Next I share views on nurturing education as a kind of solution to chilly climates. I then contest safety by looking at calls to create discomfort as an impetus to transformative learning. Finally, I reconcile the contrasting approaches.

A history of classroom climate research.

Empirical classroom climate research tends to focus on how *instructors* help create the classroom climate, with a few notable exceptions. Classroom climate studies historically were more likely to focus on correlates between variables such as classroom climate survey results and achievement (e.g., Walberg & Anderson, 1968) attendance (e.g., Moos & Moos, 1978), and satisfaction (e.g., DeYoung, 1977). In this section I trace an abbreviated history of empirical classroom climate research before looking in more detail at issues of safety and risk as they pertain to student-student interactions.

Formal classroom climate research began in 1929 (Chavez, 1984). At that time, Kurt Lewin's (1939) field theory, in which he posited that behavior was a function of the person and the environment, was influential. He and colleagues studied how the dispositions of club leaders affected behaviors of the club members (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). A key finding was that, based on the leadership style of the leader (categorized as autocratic, democratic, or laissez-

faire), fighting and productivity on projects rose and fell. Fighting was highest under laissez-faire leadership, and lowest under autocratic leadership. But of particular interest was that in the absence of the leader, democratically led groups maintained a high level of productivity: educators want their students to sustain their “productivity” long after the students have left the teacher.

Lewin, Lippitt, and White’s study inspired researchers to focus heavily on the teacher in classroom settings as the leader and creator of the classroom climate. As noted in Chapter 1, an important contributor to the field was Withall (1949), who was the first to formally define classroom climate as

A general emotional factor which appears to be present in interactions occurring between individuals in face-to-face groups. It seems to have some relationship to the degree of acceptance expressed by members of a group regarding each other's needs or goals. Operationally defined, it is considered to influence: (1) the inner private world of each individual; (2) the esprit de corps of a group; (3) the sense of meaningfulness of group and individual goals and activities; (4) the objectivity with which a problem is attacked; and (5) the kind and extent of interpersonal interaction in a group. (p. 348)

This definition came out of a study that was methodologically unique for the time: he asked students to participate in rating the classroom climate rather than solely relying on an observer. This methodological innovation would be adopted as time went on. Of note here is the contradiction between Withall’s definition and his insistence on focusing research on teachers—

each of the elements he presents is dependent on student-student interaction, even if the teacher imposes rules governing such interactions.

Research as carried out by an observer on classroom climates continued and developed into systems like the Flanders Interaction Analysis (Chavez, 1984; Freiburg, 1981) and a typology by Good & Brophy (1969). Non-participant observer research provides important insights into classroom climate phenomena (e.g., Fritschner, 2000). But as Fraser (2012) points out, it is limited in time and scope. In some observational studies of classroom climate (e.g., Heller, Puff, & Mills, 1985), researchers only observed a single class session. Observer studies also ignore the lifeworld of the classroom as experienced first-hand by the learner, the first component of Withall's (1949) definition.

Pace and Stern (1958), rather than rely on observations, conducted some of the first surveys of college climates. Survey instruments deal with the issue of one-shot observation by allowing students and faculty to quantify their perceptions generally over time. And, as Fraser (2012) discusses, studies using instruments are more economical since observers do not have to be trained or paid. Participants' perceptions are pooled to show differences between classroom or college climates. To answer the critique that surveys rely on self-reports, Fraser points out that the perception of events in a classroom drive student behavior more so than an outside observer's perception of a classroom (Fraser, 2012). The problem with surveys more relevant to this study is that they corral student responses into pre-determined forms. Thus, while it may be true that student perception drives student behavior, surveys lack the ability to truly capture student perceptions in their inherent complexity.

Some of these instruments had elements that focused on student-student interactions—for example the College and University Classroom Environment Inventory (CUCEI) (Fraser, Treagust, & Dennis, 1986) and College Classroom Environment Scales (CCES) (Winston et al., 1994)—and were all designed based on Moos' (1974) theoretical framework, which evolved from Lewin's and Stern's prior work. Moos proposed that every human environment is composed of three dimensions: relationship, personal development, and system maintenance and system change. The relationship dimension “identif[ied] the nature and intensity of personal relationships within the environment” (p. 11). The personal development dimension “assess[ed] the basic directions along which personal growth and self-enhancement tend[ed] to occur” (p. 13). The system maintenance and system change dimension “assess[ed] the extent to which the environment [was] orderly, clear in its expectations, maintain[ed] control and [was] responsive to change (pp. 13-14). These dimensions were the basis for instruments used to assess many kinds of group environments. But by carefully examining the scales designed to measure relationship dimensions, one can learn about teacher-student and student-student interaction.

For example, on the CUCEI, one of the seven scales, satisfaction, was considered a dependent variable. The CUCEI was found to have generally high Cronbach's alpha reliability scores and adequate discriminant validity (Fraser et al., 1986). In a large study of graduates and undergraduates ($n = 499$), mean satisfaction scores correlated significantly with relationship dimension-based scales such as student cohesiveness, which was directly related to student-student relations, and personalization, which was concerned with teacher-student relationships

(Fraser et al., 1986). Students reported greater satisfaction when they perceived there to be greater interpersonal connections.

Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999) administered the CUCEI to 280 liberal arts college students and found that low scores on the relationship-based scales of the instrument were correlated with higher levels of cheating. That is, of the 11% of students surveyed that reported some form of academic dishonesty, those students rated their courses as lower on relationship scales of the CUCEI. While one might find different results at a land-grant institution, it seems logical that if students perceive low or no connection to other students or the professor, they feel less responsibility to be academically honest.

Vahala and Winston Jr. (1994) used the CCES (with average Cronbach's alpha reliability of .81 and adequate validity) to investigate the differences in introductory classroom climate among institution type and three subject areas: the behavioral sciences, English, and laboratory sciences. Liberal arts colleges were rated higher on relationship dimensions than universities, and English classes were perceived to be most supportive of relationships of the three disciplines.

With such broad-stroke measures of personal support, it is difficult to know whether or not students prefer more interaction with the professor, content individualization, or more student-student interactions. We also cannot know whether or not more transformative learning occurs in English classes.

Fraser (1986) issued a call to repeat the extensive correlational research carried out at elementary and secondary levels with classroom climate survey instruments in the tertiary sector. His call was unheeded. Perhaps due to the lack of analytical depth of the originally published

studies (Fraser, 1986; Fraser et al., 1986), researchers in higher education created their own, more complex surveys (e.g., Fassinger, 1995).

The weakness of classroom climate research conducted with survey instruments comes in the lack of information about how the courses studied provide meaning to students and whether or not learning outcomes are transformative. And with such research it seems the strongest claims made are that generally, “better” classroom climates (as determined by the direction in which items are scaled) are correlated with outcomes such as less cheating (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999). In higher education, the connections between achievement and affective measures so common in the K-12 sector (Fraser, 2012) are either not highlighted in the research or not strong. It may be that higher education researchers are aware of the poor correlations between college grade point averages and various measures of life “success” (Cohen, 1984).

Another issue with the CUCEI and CCES scales is that Moos’ framework was not developed from research on what students or teachers find desirable in classroom climates. Fraser, Treagust, and Dennis (1986) consulted teachers and students to see if the scales included in the CUCEI were “salient,” but from their description, it was not possible to tell how rigorous they were. For the CUCEI and the CCES attempts were made to show reliability and validity, but if construct validity was only assured through asking a small number of teachers and students for salience, data gathered with such instruments is not as relevant to teachers and learners as it could be.

But what can be gleaned from the studies presented so far is that relationships matter and can possibly lead to satisfaction (Fraser et al., 1986) and less cheating (Pulvers & Diekhoff,

1999). Two items from the CUCEI, “Students put effort into what they do in classes,” and “Students in this class get to know each other well” show the emphasis placed on social relations between students and awareness of academic contributions of other students. Such scales point to the importance of relational learning. Students want to get along and see that others are contributing. For Thayer-Bacon (1997; 2003; 2010), a philosopher of education, everything people learn and can know is socially constructed, embedded in environmental and social contexts, and embodied by knowers. What we come to know and how we come to know it is shaped by the people around us. In order for learners to develop a voice with which they can contribute to knowledge, they must be nurtured by those around them (Thayer-Bacon, 1997). In a classroom setting, the potential nurturers include instructors and other students. Yet many times students do not develop their voice in the higher education setting, and some have blamed the “chilly climate” (Hall & Sandler, 1982).

Chilly climates.

The next phase of classroom climate research in higher education was brought on by one of the earliest reports on some of the obstacles women face broadly in tertiary education settings. Hall and Sandler (1982) documented many issues that contributed to a generally sexist atmosphere that prevented women from being as successful in college as men. While criticized for relying too much on “anecdotal evidence” (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990), Hall and Sandler were among the first to document microaggressions and their influences, one of which was a reluctance on the part of women to participate in class discussions. The report by Hall and

Sandler (1982) sparked debate and research on how classroom and college climates were less amenable (or hostile) to women.

The Journal of Higher Education (JHE) has published many studies that have examined, among other things, the chilly climate and its relation to student participation (e.g., Allan & Madden, 2006; Crombie, Pyke, Silverthorn, Jones, & Piccinin, 2003; Fassinger, 1995; Weaver & Qi, 2005). These studies sought to differentiate participation based on up to as many as 29 other variables (Fassinger, 1995), some of which focused on student-student perceptions not unlike the CUCEI. Findings differed dramatically: Weaver and Qi (2005) found that class size had a very small effect on participation, but Fassinger (1995) found class size to be one of the most important variables, and one of only four that correlated to the level of at least .25 with her participation measure.

Some of the JHE studies relied on researcher-designed survey instruments. Surveys like the CUCEI may have been ignored by higher education researchers because of their simplicity, but the surveys used in articles from JHE also have deficiencies. The CUCEI and its predecessors were based in field theory (Lewin, 1939) and its offshoots. In the JHE studies a declared basis in any theoretical framework is rare. Astin's (1984) theory of involvement is cited by Tinto (1997). Weaver and Qi (2005) did not have a theoretical basis, but was rare in that students collaborated at multiple stages of the development of the instrument to ensure validity. In none of the other articles do authors describe whether or not any participants were asked about the salience of survey items, leaving open the question of validity.

As to the relative length of the different surveys, Weaver and Qi (2005) used an instrument investigating 10 “variables” with a total of 233 items. Variables included relatively simple constructs like age and more complex constructs like “Fear of Peer Disapproval.” Weaver and Qi reported nothing in regard to the reliability of their instrument.

Most of the studies from the JHE did report on limitations such as size and location of university, fidelity of the sample to the population of total students at the institution, and type of institution. These differences could explain some of the variation in results.

No definitive answer has been reached as to whether a climate that is chilly for women exists (or did exist in 1982) in higher education. An issue with these JHE-published studies is that researchers often used 500 or more participants, which resulted in more clear distributions. Such reports do little to assure validity in the context of a single classroom with an n of 30.

Participation is of particular interest for this study because it is a first step in student-student interaction. In an oft-cited observational study, Karp and Yoels (1976) found that college classrooms may be “chilly” for most students regardless of sex: only a few students tend to participate. They dubbed this phenomenon the “consolidation of responsibility,” and similar patterns of participation have been found in various reports since. For example, Crombie, Pyke, Silverthorn, Jones, and Piccinin (2003), who administered self-report surveys, found that fewer than ten percent of students surveyed considered themselves very active classroom participants (p. 69). Other observational studies have found higher rates of participation depending on course level and age of the student (Fritschner, 2000). Fritschner used undergraduate students in a qualitative research course to assist in her large study: students were non-participant observers in

32 courses, attended an average of 11 sessions for each course, and interviewed student and professor participants. Fritschner found that participation rates ranged from 16% in introductory level courses to 65% in upper-level courses.

In some reports the division of the “talkers” and “non-talkers” (Fritschner, 2000) is stark and the talkers in some way irritate the non-talkers. Irritation or exasperation was a common finding in studies using observations (Karp & Yoels, 1976), psychometric instruments (Purcell, 2010) and observations and interviews (Fritschner, 2000).

In a well-designed qualitative study of safe and unsafe classrooms, Holley and Steiner (2005) asked undergraduate and graduate students to write a series of words or phrases to describe courses in which they did not feel comfortable to share. The most common descriptions of participants in “unsafe” classrooms were that the instructors were critical, chastised or shot down student ideas, and other students did not speak (p. 58).

Holley and Steiner noted the limitations of their data: it is hard to know what students meant when they said instructors are critical in unsafe classrooms, but some qualitative studies (e.g., Fritschner, 2000) give examples that may be related. In one course, a professor repeatedly asked for participation, but did not get it. Observations of the professor showed that he berated students after a particular exam and told students they did not participate because they did not want to look stupid.

Holley and Steiner (2005) noted that students place an overwhelming responsibility for safe and unsafe classroom climates on the instructor. Considering the widely-held assumption that teachers control the content of their classrooms, this attribution is not surprising. But other

studies found that internal factors such as preparedness for class (Weaver and Qi, 2005) and external factors like student-student connectedness (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010) also play a major role in whether or not the climate is chilly.

College classroom climates have been found to be chilly (and hostile) for groups other than women. Booker (2007), Davis et al. (2004), and Thomas et al. (2007) focused on the experience of African American students at predominantly White colleges. African American students, when interviewed, spoke of classroom climate extensively. Booker (2007) focused on the students' classroom experiences, Davis et al. (2004) and Thomas et al. (2007) used non-directive, phenomenological interviews, so any mention of specific classroom climate issues was spontaneous rather than elicited.

The students in these studies experienced many forms of overt and covert racism. Not surprisingly, "when students perceived prejudice or intolerance among peers, it adversely affected how closely connected they felt to others in the educational environment" (Booker, 2007, p. 184). The participants in Davis et al. (2004) noted that racism "happen[ed] every day" and made them feel like outsiders. In Thomas et al. (2007), participants "devoted much of their commentary to negative experiences in the classroom" (p. 11). Fear of being put down and lack of trust prevented students from feeling safe to express themselves (Booker, 2007).

In another recent study that focused on student perceptions of how other students contributed to classroom climate, Galanes and Carmack (2013) found in focus group interviews that participants found certain student behaviors detrimental to learning. They conducted six focus groups of 5-7 participants each with a total of 35 participants. They reached saturation after

the fourth focus group and conducted two more. Participants said that “bad” student behaviors included dominating classroom conversations, having a negative attitude, being disrespectful to instructors, and expecting other students to help without reciprocation. One major limitation noted by Galanes and Carmack in this study was that students almost without exception portrayed themselves as good students and minimized their bad behaviors. This performance effect reduces the rigor of the study. Another weakness of the study is the dismissal of demographic factors like race or gender in the conclusions they reached. It is much easier for a White student to have a “positive attitude” since they do not deal with racism “every day” (Davis et al., 2004). However, being the only study of its kind, the results are worth examining here.

Galanes and Carmack (2013) noted that there were far fewer comments about what constituted bad students than comments about students that contribute positively to the classroom environment. Galanes and Carmack’s focus on student-student perceptions is the only purely qualitative study with a specific intent to show what students say about “good” and “bad” student behavior and how such behaviors shape the classroom climate. Their results show some of the potential for classroom climates that are warm and nurturing.

Nurturing classroom climates.

Galanes and Carmack (2013) began with a constant comparative analysis of the focus group interviews, but were surprised that student talk did not so much construct identities of good and bad students, as they originally expected, but rather led to a discussion of classroom climate as co-constructed by all its actors. Quotes from the focus group interviews show the kinds of academic contributions students appreciate: “[Carol is] always obviously paying

attention, you can tell. She asks questions, she's involved in the teaching process, she doesn't just sit there and kind of look at the clock..." (p. 55) and the kinds of relational contributions students appreciate:

Belonging was important to Tim, who appreciated the chance to get to know the other students, to become close, and to share personal stories: "That helped me . . . I belong here. I'm not just an outsider. That really helped a lot." (p. 57)

A sense of belonging has been found to be important for achievement and retention (Tinto, 1997). Belonging was particularly important for African American students. When African American students were active in the life of the class, engaged in discussion, and allowed to express ideas and opinions openly, they reported a connection to others in the classroom (Booker, 2007, p. 183). Booker (2007) and Thomas et al. (2007) found that participants responded positively to professors that were open and practiced disclosure. Students appreciated when professors provided a safe and comfortable environment of inclusion for students (Booker, 2007; Thomas et al. 2007, p. 11).

As noted by Holley and Steiner (2005), students place the onus of classroom climate on the instructor. In "safe" classrooms, their participants' most commonly mentioned type of knowledge gained was of "others' ideas, perspectives, and thoughts" or "others' experiences, or others' experiences became more personal" (p. 55). One of their prompts asked students to describe courses in which they "felt they were able and willing to raise controversial thoughts and opinions or share personal experiences that were related to the course material" (p. 53). With this prompt, they reached to the essence of classroom safety as a requisite for academic risk-

taking and participation. Characteristics of a “safe” classroom were that instructors and students were nonjudgmental, honest, and respectful (p. 56). With their participants, safety allowed them to be honest, and unsafe classrooms were silent. Also of note, students reported that they learned more and felt challenged in classrooms that were safe (p. 56).

These quotes show some empirical evidence for the kinds of classroom climates envisioned by Thayer-Bacon and other philosophers of education like Noddings and Martin. These philosophers of education are among a small number of scholars that have developed normative arguments about the importance of students and instructors engaging together relationally to learn in ways that are deeply changing. Pestalozzi (2015) was one of the first to do so, and his concept of a “pedagogic atmosphere” of love and trust is still relevant. But his focus on the adult-child relationship within and beyond the scope of schools put his work outside the scope of this review.

For the most part, ideas about relational learning are exceptional in that the majority of educational philosophy is carried out in the liberal rationalist tradition by men (for clear discussions on the exclusion of women and the liberal rationalist tradition, see Martin, 1982; Thayer-Bacon, 2008). In circles of educational research outside of educational philosophy, relational learning was introduced to a broad audience with the term “connected knowing” from Belenky et al. (1986).

For Thayer-Bacon (2010), Martin (1992), and Noddings (1992), caring relations should be developed between and among teachers, students, families, and the content of study. These authors’ writings apply to various contexts (popular education, higher education, and K-12

public schools) but none of them write exclusively about children, and here I apply their ideas to higher education and relate them to research in teaching and learning at the college level.

Noddings' (1992) vision, offered for the K-12 sector, but extended to higher education (e.g., Arnett & Arneson, 1999; Thayer-Bacon, 2010), was to adopt a curriculum of moral education centered on Buber's (1947) concepts of caring. The ideal classroom climate for Noddings is one in which teachers care for students and students feel they are cared for. That care is a relational phenomenon is of central importance to Noddings' arguments: any teacher can claim to care for students, but until the students are in their eyes cared for, care is empty or paternalistic. According to Noddings (1992), establishing an atmosphere of care is the first priority for teachers because "subject matter cannot carry itself. Relation...precedes any engagement with subject matter" (p. 36). A relational reciprocity must be established for learning to occur.

This idea may be problematic in higher education where the status of content is more elevated than in K-12 education. However, scholar-professors, when their identity is wrapped up with the content they teach, make content instruction personal, and Buber (1947) believed that all humans desired confirmatory interaction, not just youth and children. Noddings notes that care can happen between any two people, but she mainly focuses on unequal relations—those in which one person tends to be the carer the majority of the time (p. 91). She discusses friendships as a form of equal relations and even colleagues, but does not devote any special attention to the student-student relationship.

For Noddings (1992), care is “a loving act founded on a relation of some depth” (p. 26), and has four components. She argues that care has to be *shown* or modeled first since it cannot be taught directly. *Dialogue* is a process between the carer and cared for that ensures that ends are not pre-determined. Students must have opportunities to *practice* care in educational settings. Lastly, *confirmation* is a part of moral education and has as its goal “lift[ing] us toward our vision of a better self” (p. 25). Noddings rejects the idea that a method can be used in the application of confirmation; the way to confirm depends on the student.

Ellis (2004), a communications education scholar, draws on confirmation (Buber, 1957) to study operationalized instructor behaviors through her Teacher Confirmation Scales (TCS). Confirmation for Ellis (2004), like for Noddings (1992), is based on Buber’s ideas that the people with whom we form relationships play a key role in the formation of our identity. Teachers can see, affirm, and encourage qualities within their students. Ellis uses a typology of confirmation composed of recognition, acknowledgement, and endorsement to construct the TCS. Its three scales correspond to the typology and contain questions, respectively, that ask students to respond to questions regarding how college instructors listened and responded to students, instructor interest in the student learning process, and the style instructors used to help students understand content (Goodboy & Myers, 2008).

In the interest of traditional learning, TC has been shown to be effective: TC was positively correlated to student effort (Campbell et al., 2009); cognitive learning, affective learning, and motivation (Ellis, 2004; Goodboy & Myers, 2008); and, of particular interest for this study, student-student interaction (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010).

So while Ellis' (2004) intent was to research how instructor behaviors affect learning outcomes, Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) investigated how teacher confirmation affects student-student connectedness, as measured by the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory CCCI (Dwyer, Carlson, Cruz, Bingham, Prisbell, & Fus, 2004). They administered surveys to undergraduate students at a mid-size university and found that teacher confirmation (measured with Ellis' TCS), predicted in-class and out-of-class involvement. Student connectedness increased involvement regardless of class size, and a confirming teaching style was directly associated with student connectedness. Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield's (2010) findings indicate that "using a participatory teaching style in a classroom lowers the potentially adversarial nature of teacher-student interaction, fosters a sense of linkage among students, and can generate a comfortable, supportive communication environment" (p. 178). Considering the typical expectation of students that teachers set a tone for the classroom, it is logical that TC would increase the likelihood of students forming positive relationships with each other as well.

The advantages and disadvantages of surveys were discussed above, but the TCS and CCCI had high reliability (Cronbach's alpha of .94 and .95, respectively) and validity (evidenced with validity items and cross-validated samples, respectively) (Dwyer et al., 2004; Ellis, 2004). The issue Buber and Noddings might have with this research is that caring should not become a technique because in so doing, it loses its relational quality. Caring and confirmation, at least as defined by Noddings, cannot be observed. When the recipient of care is not taken into account, confirmation, whether practiced by teachers with students or students with other students, becomes nothing more than good manners.

Noddings' conceptualization of care is intended as an alternative to the liberal arts education in place in public schools. She argues that while every student need not study history, all students need to be educated in ways that prepare them for adult lives where they "live nonviolently with each other, sensitively and in harmony with the natural environment, reflectively and serenely with themselves" (p. 12). Even if this call would seem more foreign in a higher education setting than an elementary school, adult students can learn to care as well. As Thayer-Bacon (2010) points out, many elite liberal arts colleges advertise their small student to teacher ratio, and Noddings' four components of care have been cited directly in calls for campus civility (e.g., Arnett & Arneson, 1999). The need for students to care for each other is clear in the context of increasing concerns regarding campus civility.

How and whether or not instructors and students care has consequences for how and what we learn. Thayer-Bacon (2010) and Tuan (1977) traced relational and emplaced knowing back to mother and child. The mother's lap is the first place a child ever knows, and its placeness is dependent entirely on the mother/child relationship. In that first place, there is safety, comfort, nurture, and belonging. It is through this first relationship and the strong relationships that follow, argues Thayer-Bacon (2010), that children begin to know and understand themselves and develop a voice (Thayer-Bacon, 1997). The safety of intimate relationships with others creates the possibility for the beginnings of autonomy in the form of identity. More connections with other people and places help children expand their view of the world and their voices, which can help them improve the socially constructed heritage passed down to them (Thayer-Bacon, 2010).

Once these children enter youth and adulthood, the ability to expand their view of the world continues to depend on the people around them.

For Martin (1992), the atmosphere of home is the ideal one for school and classroom climate. Martin largely focused on the integration of Montessori methods into public, K-12 schools, highlighting the similarities of the original impetus for the *Casa de bambini*, which were bad areas in Rome after the first world war, with the dangerous and dilapidated public schools of the United States that make the news. For Martin the realm of the domestic should be a model for the classroom in order to combat alienation and have all students feel nurtured. She includes the influential and controversial Hall and Sandler (1982) report on classroom climate in higher education to show the ways that sexism shapes what counts as knowledge in an institutional setting and that devaluing women and the realm of the domestic can lead to violence against them. The atmosphere of the home she desires for educational settings is one in which the knowledge associated with mothering (as a form of teaching) is given equal value to the forms more associated with masculinity (Martin cites William James' fascination with war as an example, p. 128).

When teachers provide a caring, homelike atmosphere, they encourage student connectedness (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010), and provide another set of relationships in which students can feel personally supported, acknowledged, and appreciated, such that they can become more autonomous (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). A classroom climate that encourages student-student relationships also contributes to individual development. It is possible that with the comfort and safety of home or caring relations among students and instructors, the barriers of

alienation common to higher education institutions, particularly those like community colleges with little or no student cohort development (Grellier, 2013), can be overcome and students can face their challenges knowing they have support.

Safety and comfort are often sought after characteristics for a classroom climate. The four walls of the classroom and the conventions brought to them allow for students to be separated from the potentially dangerous and chaotic outside world. The classroom is a refuge from the vagaries of weather and, usually, violence. Having a “community of learners” is the goal of many instructors in higher education, whether the goal be retention (e.g., Tinto, 1997) or increased participation and learning (e.g., McKinney, McKinney, Franiuk, & Schweitzer, 2006), a safe classroom environment ideally provides course participants opportunities to form these communities so they can share their different talents and perspectives to pursue, appropriate, and create knowledge. Ideally, a diversity of ideas are expressed, which can aid students in critical self-reflection when they compare other ideas with their own, a “basic condition for transformative learning” (McGonigal, in Riggs & Hellyer-Riggs, 2009).

Safety has been found in empirical studies to be a matter of students feeling judged (Dwyer et al., 2004; Holley & Steiner, 2005) or appearing unintelligent in front of their peers or professor (Rocca, 2010; Weaver & Qi, 2005), but the notion that some students can be safe at all is highly contested philosophically and theoretically (Barrett, 2010; Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2006). Non-dominant students can experience a lack of safety or open hostility from students and professors alike, as found in empirical studies (e.g., Cech & Waidzun, 2011; Thomas et al.,

2007). Zembylas (2006) notes, “there are no ‘safe’ classroom spaces, if one considers that conditions of power and privilege always operate in them” (p. 321).

As far back as Withall (1949), who studied psychosocial climate in K-12 settings empirically, the importance of a safe classroom climate was thought to be essential to learning: “Learning...is most likely to occur...in a non-threatening situation, that is, the learner is free from a sense of personal threat, [and] interacts with others in a wholesome social milieu...” (p. 347). K-12 pre-service teachers find sections or entire chapters in their textbooks on how to create safe classroom climates for their students (e.g., Ormrod, 2014). The calls for classroom safety are not limited to children and youth: in guidelines for adult educators, one of the common tenets in adult education is to establish a “friendly” and “non-threatening” classroom environment (e.g., Galbraith, 1989). But to what extent should educators eschew risk or conflict? If safety means nurturing without conflict, students can grow complacent (Boostrom, 1998) or repeat the ills of the home or their existing relational networks (Mayo, 2010). Greene (1988) calls for upsetting habit and routine to “seek alternative ways of being” (p. 2), surely pursuits that can seem dangerous to students and instructors alike.

Against nurturing education: Discomfort and learning.

For Boler (1999), and Mayo (2010), conflict and discomfort are central to the task of educating for change. Boostrom (1998) questions the use of the metaphor of a “safe space” for the classroom and argues that safety is a detrimental metaphor and represents a different attitude towards teaching and learning than that of authors such as Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey: “learning necessarily involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former condition in

favour of a new way of seeing things” (p. 399). Boostrom worries that the increase of the safe space metaphor encourages teachers to make classrooms free from any kind of criticism or psychic stress. He sees the logical end of a safe classroom climate as one in which conflict is eliminated, and calls on teachers to manage conflict rather than prohibit it (p. 407). But Boostrom, writing for the general audience of teachers and instructors, over-estimates the ability of the teacher to impose safety between and among students.

Barrett (2010) extends Boostrom’s argument to include the difficulties that instructors of college classrooms face in making a classroom safe for non-dominant students. Barrett (2010) says that “Students who belong to racially, socially, or economically marginalized groups live in a world which is inherently unsafe—a world where racialization, sexism, ableism, classism, and heteronormativity pose genuine threats to their psychological, social, material, and physical well-being” (p. 7). Instructors cannot eliminate those differences in their classrooms, and the repetition of a home-like environment may interfere with transformative learning.

Others argue that risk is the essence of education. For Piaget and Vygotsky (Goodman, 2010), learning and development require some challenge, whether it be an internal sensation of disequilibrium or a recognition that some more knowledgeable other is needed to gain competence in learning to use a desirable social tool. Boler (1999) and Mayo (2010) do not describe their approaches as inviting or home-like. Since a “safe” classroom environment may be a smokescreen for the perpetuation of status quo power differences and oppression (Zembylas, 2006), Boler and Mayo emphasize the role of conflict in achieving learning goals that include social justice. Mayo (2010) supports the idea of building relations between and among students

and instructors, but describes the difficulties of relations when varying kinds of privilege affect how people can work together. A nurturing and kind gesture, such as celebrating a heterosexual class member's engagement to be married (until very recently) could highlight the taken-for-granted ease of such events and could hit a nerve for a homosexual class member. Avoiding the conflicts created by power differences and historical subjugation, for these authors, doubles the difficulties non-dominant students face. If students are to form relationships through confirmation, for example, a non-privileged student may be forced into silence by an "isn't that great" chorus from the majority of the students. Mayo (2010) helps us see how this complicates the ability to form student-student and student-instructor relationships. If all identities and difficulties individuals face are equated, the power differences that exist remain undisturbed. The easy existence of one student infringes on that of a less-privileged student. The refrain, "We're a community," allows students to gloss over potentially troubling differences. But Mayo says that naming and wrestling with power differences *together* can spur change. Mayo emphasizes the importance of student involvement in the process of anti-racist pedagogy, but despite the fact that her students are adults, her recommendations all place primary responsibility on the instructor. Unlike Mayo, Boler (1999) places central responsibility on students.

Boler (1999) suggests that the only way to have transformative learning is to subscribe to a *pedagogy of discomfort*, a process of "becoming" in which classroom participants collectively examine societal and social structures and identity in a way that delays the rush to solid conclusions, the dichotomy of blame, and easy resolutions. The pedagogy of discomfort's collective inquiry focuses on "values and cherished beliefs," "constructed self-images," and

“how one has learned to perceive others” (pp. 176-177). Boler says that participants must recognize that “emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see” (p. 177). To recognize and discuss self-images, or identity, and emotions in a classroom is inherently risky, since, as (Palmer, 2007) points out, the self is exposed, and the encounter with the other could inspire change.

We fear encounters in which the other is free to be itself, to speak its own truth, to tell us something we may not wish to hear. We want those encounters on our own terms, so that we can control their outcomes, so that they will not threaten our view of world and self (pp. 37-38).

The selections or avoidances that people make in what they see in relation to who they are and the ways they “story” their identities are wrapped up with emotions. Even when topics are less controversial than race and sexual orientation, learners can be deeply emotionally invested in their knowledge, and change is scary.

The “emotional selectivity” that Boler challenges with the pedagogy of discomfort is a kind of defense mechanism. The tendency to select, simplify, and schematize is a human quality that helps us order chaos (Boler, 1999). Indeed, many cognitive learning theories describe the process of learning in just such terms (Schunk, 2012). Challenging this tendency is the purpose of the pedagogy of discomfort. She encourages students to “inhabit an ambiguous sense of self” (p. 188). The attempt to delay or avoid schematization could be required for transformative learning to occur.

Boler's principal challenge to students is to engage in *collective witness*. The goal is to avoid the "dichotomy of blame," or the categorization of people into the guilty and the innocent. Blaming others moves the locus of control away from students in a classroom. Collective witness forges relationships through challenging students to be present to each other and investigate personal genealogies² of thought. Boler uses the "collective" of relative comfort provided by fellow, fallible classmates to explore the origins of schematized conceptions of the world. It is scary to inhabit a morally ambiguous self, to be in limbo, but to manage a classroom in which students witness together is the call Boler issues.

Macdonald (2013), in a mixed method autoethnography and course case study, described her use of Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort in an anthropology course in South Africa. She recounted the difficulties she and her students faced and thematized student reactions to pedagogy of discomfort. Inspired by Boler, Macdonald (2013) asked students

to recognise and embrace discomfoting emotional investments as moments to interrogate rather than ... result[s] of intuitive inference, even if this simply meant to park the discomfort for a better time with which to name it and work with it towards conceptual shifts in understanding (p. 675).

She examined the results of implementing pedagogy of discomfort by coding and analyzing answers to an exam question that asked students to write an ethnographic essay that

² Boler uses the term genealogy rather than history to refer the Foucauldian idea that histories as told obscure power relations.

referenced an uncomfortable learning experience from the class. Students reported feeling lost, ashamed, or blown apart (p. 676) by pedagogy of discomfort. Some students “showed initial signs of retreating” (p. 676). Only two students, she said, understood the importance of emotions and how pedagogy of discomfort was vastly different than typical, cognitively focused education.

Macdonald seemed to foster transformative learning, but absent either from student responses or Macdonald’s analysis of them was central discussion of the process of collective witness. There were ample data that indicated perspective changes: exchange students re-examined their framing of study abroad, a local ‘black’ woman reframed the silence of African anthropology (p. 678). How closely these essays reflected transformative learning is difficult to deduce from the snippets provided, but, at minimum, they seemed to represent a change in meaning scheme, if not meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1990). But apparently for these students, critical self-reflection was more salient than the relational aspects of learning. This may in part be explained by Macdonald’s note that students did not fully grasp the non-cognitive nature of the pedagogy of discomfort. It may also be that the instructor dominated course dialogue.

As defined by Mezirow (2000), a meaning scheme is lower on the transformative learning totem pole. *Meaning schemes* are general expectations related to specific situations. *Meaning perspectives* are more closely tied to epistemological assumptions. One of Macdonald’s exchange students challenged his view of himself as a do-gooder. He expected to be praised and rewarded for doing non-profit work in the global south, but was met with skepticism (this spurred a change in meaning scheme). If he indeed found himself to be much more extrinsically

motivated than he thought, he may have experienced a change in meaning perspective as well. At least in his case, the skeptical reactions of other students were a part of his learning experience.

In their essays students showed an understanding of pedagogy of discomfort as “learning through *provoked* discomfort” (Macdonald, 2013, p. 677, emphasis original). They associated the discomfort with the instructor, as opposed to the content of the course or other students, despite numerous examples from student essays describing discomfort in relation to the topic of apartheid. What Macdonald leaves out of her analysis is the degree to which relationships among the students formed or did not form. In that sense, Macdonald’s application of the pedagogy of discomfort lacked a key element of fidelity.

Redmond (2010) reports another classroom situation in which relations were difficult (Mayo, 2010). Student-student connection is not always facilitated with higher participation. Redmond (2010), in a critical incident reflection, recalled a class session in which a well-intentioned student made a comment that was interpreted as bigoted by others in the class. When a guest speaker said that feminist concern over Afghani women wearing burkas during a war was a sign of cultural imperialism, the student questioned her association of feminism with imperialism (p. 2). Redmond’s example illustrates the difficulty of creating a safe space: this student became a pariah for her question. Redmond, the instructor, felt helpless to stop the comments directed at the student and so failed in her attempts to keep the classroom safe. If a student is assailed without instructor intervention, it is unlikely other students will venture disclosures of their own. If students are not sharing, it is not possible to re-examine their ideas with others and the possibility for transformative learning is reduced. In this situation Boler’s

(1999) collective witness may have helped avoid the way the questioner was harassed after her comment.

Reconciling Safety and Risk

On the surface it seems as if a pedagogy of discomfort would reject safety and comfort outright, but the focus on collective witness (as opposed to individual self-reflection) and that we have to be “comfortable” with the uncertainty, shows the importance of *some kind* of safety. In Boler and Mayo’s cases this safety comes with the personal support of others, even though those others are differently privileged. In transformative learning theory, too, learners must experience some kind of (discomforting) disorienting dilemma, but its resolution is dependent on the kinds of relations the learner has.

The contrasting ideas of safety and discomfort presented above come up again and again in classroom climate discussions. Tuan (1977) provides a powerful framework from which to examine those ideas from the lens of humanistic geography. Tuan’s main theme—that space is freedom and place is security (p. 3)—is footnoted with the possibility that space can be scary and place restrictive. Agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces, and claustrophobia, the fear of being in tight places, help highlight the need humans have for both freedom and constraint (p. 54). These basic human experiences translate to the classroom: even if it is not an open stretch of highway or a secluded shelter, students get a sense of freedom and/or security based on the structure of a class. In the same classroom, I have had some students argue for more discussion because they felt censored and others who begged me to lecture more because they felt there were too many disparate opinions.

The difficulty of creating a safe or risky climate for students comes from the individual differences in perception regarding space and place. One student could reject community-building exercises as fit for a coffee shop and not a classroom. Another may suffer crippling anxiety when challenged to take a stand, or at least make a statement, on a controversial topic.

In Maxine Greene's (1973, 1988) work, one can find calls for conflict alongside calls for the relational pursuit of freedom. Among her principal concerns were freedom and agency. For Greene (1988), relatedness, communication, and disclosure are the context in which freedom must be pursued (p. 121). She envisions classrooms where students come together to create freedom and possibilize different futures.

The aim is to find (or create) an authentic public space, that is, one in which diverse human beings can appear before one another as, to quote Hannah Arendt, "the best they know how to be." Such a space requires the provision of opportunities for the articulation of multiple perspectives in multiple idioms, out of which something common can be brought into being...In contexts of this kind, open contexts where persons attend to another with interest, regard, and care, there is a place for the appearance of freedom, the achievement of freedom by people in search of themselves. (p. xi)

While the nurturing terms like "care" and "regard" figure centrally in her vision, disruptions and conflict are also necessary to draw attention away from the "distractions and comforts" of "ordinary life" (p. 15). Her call for students to be their best selves is similar to Cranton's theoretical emphasis on authenticity in transformative learning. One of the most

difficult barriers to knowing, for Greene, is the comfort that comes from assurance or the presuppositions that “fix [a] vision of the world” (1973, p. 11). To learn more, to begin to bring unity to a fragmented view of the world, learners must set aside what they presume to know. It is a risky endeavor to allow the earth to shift beneath the learner’s feet:

Conscious thinking always involves a risk, a “venture into the unknown” [(Dewey, 1934, p. 263)]; and it occurs against a background of funded or sedimented meanings that must themselves be tapped and articulated, so that the mind can continue dealing consciously and solicitously with lived situations...” (p. 125)

Even in risk, learners must at minimum contextualize the risky situation on a background of relatively comfortable experiences, and at most, use the comfort as the foundation upon which to engage in risk. Part of this comfort can come through relations with other students.

Instructors may point out a way for a student to take on the challenges of risk, but what about other students? Greene suggests that instructors create a mutual existential project for students to pursue together. She suggests the use of art in various forms to disrupt the entrenched perceptions of the students and call them together to realize changes must be made. She describes the potential for personal engagement with poetry and film. Students may also find ways to connect through similar existential projects, for example, in their desire to become teachers of integrity.

Greene’s ideal classroom climate is one in which students come together and feel the possibility of freedom and a different future. Safety in the form of relationships are created

through a shared existential project. These relationships are necessary to pursue the risky work of learning in radical ways. Greene's vision, emerging from her work as a literary scholar, existentialist, and phenomenologist, contains many theoretical similarities to the theory of transformative learning.

One way instructors have enacted aspects of Greene's vision is to empower students. Ní Raghallaigh and Cunniffe (2013) had students simulate counseling sessions with each other and engage in small-group critique. Zeeman and Lotriet (2013) allowed students to create content for the class by modernizing ancient plays. Schwartz (1980) used conflict to challenge his students to transform through a democratic, open course process to force student responsibility and embody the values of social work.

Ní Raghallaigh and Cunniffe (2013) conducted a mixed methods study on a course in which participants learned social work interviewing skills. The course was designed with the idea that learners should be empowered, there should be strong relationships among all course participants, and there should be a focus on cooperative learning (p. 94). The investigators intended to study the results of active learning methodologies, but were surprised to see that students "repeatedly commented on the classroom atmosphere and the positive impact this had on their participation and engagement" (p. 100). Students felt they were in an "unthreatening" and "relaxed environment" (p. 101), and were comfortable opening up and participating in an engaged way.

The active learning methodologies of interest were social work interview role plays. Students conducted and observed interviews with each other and engaged in reflection exercises.

To keep the observation exercises from becoming passive learning experiences, instructors provided worksheets that drew learner attention to specific theoretical constructs and guided reflection. In another form of guidance, students were instructed to wear name tags and asked to introduce themselves. In this case, instructor actions facilitated student relationship development as recommended by Fassinger (1995). That students commented so extensively on classroom climate despite the researcher interest in the active learning methodologies shows the connection between the relative success and design of activities and classroom climate. A key aspect of that classroom climate was student-student interaction. In this course, all participants shared the goal of becoming better social workers, an existential project not unlike those mentioned by Greene.

Like Ní Raghallaigh and Cunniffe, Zeeman & Lotriet (2013) intended to empower students in a Greek classics drama course with active learning. Students adapted plays to contemporary settings and made them personal. In this qualitative study, the content was in the hands of the students. Students not only reported great satisfaction, but described the learning experience as unique and novel: “By being involved, it opened up a whole new sphere of education” (p. 184). The students were not, as one said, “spoon fed, we had to do research ourselves and learn how to apply the research” (p. 187).

The “perception of the professor as authority of knowledge” negatively affects self-reported participation (Weaver & Qi, 2005, p. 586). In contrast, in the courses studied by Ní Raghallaigh and Cunniffe and Zeeman and Lotriet, the instructors shared authority with students. Student knowledge and creativity was brought in, shared, subjected to critique, and used as a basis for self-reflection. These active learning methodologies fall under what Taylor (2007)

referred to as “one of the most powerful tools to foster transformative learning” because they “provid[e] students with learning experiences that are direct, personally engaging and stimulate reflection upon experience” (p. 182).

Schwartz (1980) said the most important aspect of instructor authority is to set up the rules by which the course participants will work together (p. 238). In this review of literature, few other instructors were as trusting of their students as Schwartz was of his. Schwartz moved away from the “one-sided and dull” “transmission function” of teaching by empowering students. On the first day of his sociology courses, students received a reading list, a few “lines of inquiry” to guide initial explorations, and a large bibliography with no specific required readings. Students were required to keep a journal in which they were to log their reflections on readings and field work (p. 245). His students engaged in inquiry, conflict, and came face to face with the difficulties of their future profession. For Schwartz, the goal was to have students “*own* their knowledge” by remaking it, “impos[ing] their own order on the data, and alter[ing] it to fit with what they already have” (pp. 241-242). As noted by Fritschner (2000), this is more common and more practical in upper-level courses. When professors feel they must serve the “transmission function” and impart large amounts of knowledge about a field, they are less likely to implement active learning methodologies and student-student connection often suffers as a result.

Conclusion

In this review of literature, I presented three areas of research on classroom climate. In this section I will synthesize the findings and show how my research question represents an area of research that has yet to be undertaken.

One of the clear links between the three areas of research is confirmation. Noddings (1992) and Ellis (2004) recognize the importance of Buber's (1947) articulation of the importance of confirmation within human interaction and, particularly, in education. The ability of a trusted fellow human to recognize and encourage the best in a friend or companion is recognized theoretically as a method for fostering transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). This literature supports the importance of confirmation, but the empirical work on confirmation focused on student perception of teachers, and a phenomenological approach to the student experience of other students can provide a first-person perspective of student-student interaction to see whether or not instances of confirmation stand out for students.

A major question emerging from this review of literature is whether or not the vision of Greene (1988), a classroom where safety and risk coincide in the pursuit of student change and freedom, can be realized. Are students liable to consider the "talkers" in a class irritating (e.g., Fritschner (2000); are "other people Hell," as Sartre wrote? Or can students connect in order to, in the first order, participate inside and outside of class (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010), and, in subsequent orders, envision alternate futures together (Greene, 1988)? A phenomenological investigation of the case of the EPP course SEOS can provide a look at

whether or not students note relational learning (Thayer-Bacon, 2010), a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999), or transformative learning through peers (e.g., Eisen, 2001).

The studies reviewed above provide a strong context for this dissertation, but, for the most part, the researchers focused solely on how teacher actions, plans, and activities affected classroom climate and student learning. With some exceptions (Dwyer et al., 2004; Galanes & Carmack, 2013; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010), few of these studies focus exclusively on how students perceive each other directly. In this review of literature I have shown the need to approach classroom climate and transformative learning in a novel way. With the gaps in existing literature or methodology and its connections to philosophy of education, my study will make a unique contribution to knowledge in classroom climate and transformative learning through discovering the essence of the student experience of other students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In Chapter 1, I introduced my study of the student experience of other students (SEOS). The need for my study emerges because we need to know more about the SEOS in order to more fully understand the relationship between classroom climate and transformative learning. In order to face the problem of shallow engagement with academic content in colleges and universities, I argue that we need to know how students experience each other in a course such as Existential Phenomenological Psychology (EPP), a course that is being and has been studied by the Phenomenology and Existentialism in Education Research (PEER) group in various ways (Dellard & Greenberg, 2014; Franklin, 2013; Franklin et al., 2014; N. Greenberg et al., 2015; Sohn, 2015, Sohn & Skutnik, 2014; Sohn et al., 2016), and in which students reported transformative learning (Sohn et al., 2016).

In Chapter 2, I contextualized my study by sharing research findings from transformative learning, philosophy of education, and classroom climate. I discussed relevant findings from the studies reviewed and concluded that a study of the SEOS, where I seek to non-directively discover what stands out in the experience of students that relates to other students, is needed to better understand transformative learning, classroom climate, and to encourage greater responsibility for students in the construction of the classroom climate.

In this chapter I will describe my methodology for answering the question, “What is the thematic structure of the SEOS?” I begin with an overview of phenomenology and case study, and then describe my methods in the context of methodologists in the traditions of phenomenology and phenomenological case study.

Theoretical Overview of Phenomenology and Case Study

For my study I conducted a phenomenological case study (Franklin, 2013; Lynch, Cho, Ogle, Sellman, & dosReis, 2014), a genre of research that combines phenomenological and case study methods. Echoing Stake (2000), Flyvberg (2011), says that what defines case study is not analytical technique, but boundaries. According to Flyvberg, a researcher carrying out a case study could use ethnography or narrative, phenomenology or biography. The difficulty of designing a *phenomenological* case study comes in where boundaries are drawn. Delimitations made by the researcher could eliminate crucial data for a phenomenological study. For example, a traditional survey study of classroom climate would likely fail to take into account my experience of “carrying the course with me everywhere.” With this potential weakness in mind, I justified my delimitations (see Delimitations, Chapter 1) based on my goals for the study, which are to enhance understanding of classroom climate and transformative learning by focusing on student experiences of each other.

In this age of a “dizzying array of traditions” and possibilities in qualitative research (Wright, 2003), I must describe beyond the label, “phenomenological case study” to help readers see what I intend and to help establish a “logic of justification” for my study (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). Logic of justification as a term works to indicate that what I present here is one possible methodology among many, but justified and logical for the phenomenon, the data, and my intent. Methodologies are ways of learning, and my logic of justification describes what can be learned, how, and in what context. The genre of case study has two primary scholars of reference: Stake and Yin. Yin’s (2013) approach in case study is post-positivistic and emphasizes

hypothesis testing, but most phenomenological case studies are interpretive in nature (e.g., Moorhouse & Cunningham, 2012; Rhodes & Smith, 2010), so Stake is a more helpful guide.

In this section I begin with an overview of case study and a historical discussion of phenomenology as philosophy to introduce the ideas that are the basis of phenomenological studies in social sciences. I then describe my methods of data collection and analysis in detail with commentary and comparison to other phenomenological approaches.

Case study.

According to Stake (2000), case studies tend to use all the data available to understand a bounded phenomenon and highlight what can be learned from it. Fields like law and medicine found much of their theoretical bases in case studies (Janesick, 2000).

Case studies must be identified by drawing boundaries. What is the case and what is not? Stake (2000) describes two possible intents of case studies: to make broad generalizations from the case or build particular understanding of the case itself. Like the difference between scientists and engineers, some seek the deepest understanding possible (what would be classified by Stake as an intrinsic case study) without regard to constraints of time and money. The engineer is more interested in building a bridge or road and so must focus on generalizations beyond previous case studies, what Stake (2000) calls instrumental case studies.

A phenomenological case study combines intrinsic and instrumental interests. To the extent I seek the essence of student experience, my interest is intrinsic—I want a full understanding of the SEOS and its meaning for students. Yet this meaning, combined with other quantitative data, can be used to develop implications for instructors. In this study, available data

such as attendance records, participation levels, transcriptions of class session audio, and field notes were used to complement the illustration of the SEOS. Purely phenomenological studies of the EPP course have been done on instructor planning (Franklin, 2013), student experiences as a learner (Sohn et al., 2016), and critical incidents (Dellard & Greenberg, 2014) (for details, see Chapter 1), and others are underway. In part because of the boundaries drawn (limiting the case to SEOS as opposed to the course as a whole), I wanted to open my study to multiple sources of data in order to not only interpret the meaning of others to study participants, but to portray the case to readers in a multi-faceted way including quantitative data and philosophical perspectives.

Presenting how various students describe their experience of other students in conjunction with the episodes in which students had those experiences allows the reader to get a fuller sense of the case at hand and may lead to more concrete implications for practice.

Phenomenology as philosophy.

Phenomenology began as an empirical philosophy with the work of Husserl (summarized in Ihde, 1986), who wanted to develop a science of consciousness. He was a mathematician and devised what he considered a parallel system to examine phenomena to find their essence (Lavery, 2003). This focus on what can be known was an indication of Husserl's intense focus on epistemology. Husserl's phenomenology required that a philosopher examine an object of consciousness and peel away layers of features non-essential to the object of study through a set of processes called *the reduction*. If we can see infinity in a grain of sand, we best take steps to limit our attention in inquiry. The reduction may bear a resemblance to case study—we must establish boundaries. But unlike case study, the reduction isn't about physical lines or

separations of the objective sort. The parts of the phenomenological reduction are intentionality, bracketing, and the equalization of varying accounts (Ihde, 1986).

For Robbins (2006), intentionality is “the relational stance...of human beings in specific situations” (p. 87). As conceived by Husserl, intentionality was in the mind and connected to the world, and the interplay of perceiver and perceived was the basis for his epistemology (Ihde, 1986). Intentionality refers to an inherent feature of consciousness (Lavery, 2003): it does not exist in a vacuum, it is always oriented towards an object.

Bracketing, or *epoché*, has as its goal the suspension of sedimented ways of seeing that allow people to take for granted what is “known.” Husserl wrote that epoché requires that we “set aside” and “make no use” of our preconceived notions about an object (in Franklin, 2013, p. 69). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010) described bracketing as a refusal to be complicit to the natural attitude (p. xiv). In order to bracket, Husserl used a technique known as imaginative variation, in which varying accounts of an object were given equal credence. Ihde (1986) provides an example of (philosophical) imaginative variation in which he describes a tree from the perspective of a Cartesian, who measures and classifies the tree on a clear day, and a druid, who embraces the spiritual and mystic life force of the tree during a nighttime thunderstorm. What the two descriptions have in common gives the essence of tree.

Husserl’s phenomenology was concerned with all objects of consciousness, including trees, memories, dreams, and the conjurings of imagination. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) point out that Husserl’s phenomenology was designed for philosophy, not applied fields.

The work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Merleau-Ponty expanded on the work of Husserl and made phenomenology more suited to social science research and this educational study.

Existential and hermeneutic phenomenology. The main ways that Heidegger, Gadamer, and Merleau-Ponty departed from Husserl is in their orientation to bracketing and their focus on ontology, the nature of reality or being, as opposed to Husserl's focus on epistemology, what can be known (Lavery, 2003). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) describe the differences between Husserl and subsequent phenomenologists in the terms transcendental and hermeneutic, or interpretive. The transcendental refers to Husserl's idea that an isolated philosopher can gain access to truth through the reduction. But as Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010) says, we are not "absolute mind...on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on the which we are trying to seize...there is no thought which embraces all our thought" (p. xv). Gadamer and Heidegger talked of pre-understanding, or historicity, as impossible to escape (Lavery, 2003). That is, each individual who might set out on the path of the reduction cannot transcend his or her own accumulated knowledge, beliefs, and un-reflected or non-conscious being. Merleau-Ponty reminded us that even Husserl knew that the reduction is never complete (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2010, p. xv).

Husserl intended the reduction to strip away all of our accumulated biases through bracketing, but Heidegger and Gadamer acknowledged the power of those biases to drive intentionality and understanding (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997), and Gadamer considered the possibility of complete bracketing "absurd" (Lavery, 2003). Rather than a problem to be bracketed away, bias, recast as pre-understanding, is an essential aspect of our being-in-the-

world: human experience is one of constant transaction and in fact is what drives research questions in the first place (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). If I did not have a transformational learning experience in EPP, I would not be conducting a dissertation with the course as a setting.

Because of my experience, I follow existential and hermeneutic philosophers' suggestions to explore pre-understandings. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010) emphasized the importance of the bodily experience humans have before they reflect on anything—even our scientific understandings would not make sense without some reference to lived embodiment of concepts like space and time, sickness or falling (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). In Merleau-Ponty's words, "All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless" (2010, p. ix). Mottern (2011) captures the notion with the poem, "Renascence" from St. Vincent Millay (1912):

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. (p. 60)

Only with the help of others in the world can I see beyond my stance in the world, and even then, what they help me see is filtered through my mountains and woods. That is, I can be made aware of how the woods may enhance certain things I see and obscure others. But they are my woods, and while I can become aware of them and how they differ from another person's woods, they are part of what make me who I am. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) discuss

an individual's perspectival boundedness in figure-ground terms: every perception is figural on the ground of pre-understandings. They quote William James' description of a group of American travelers to Europe—for each traveler, different features of the places they went together were figural. For one, parks and architecture, for another, the prices and distances (p. 3). What is figural for these travelers is due to the ground of their previous experiences in the world.

For Heidegger, pre-understandings are one “arc” of the hermeneutic circle (Churchill, 2006). On the other arc of the circle is an object, and both sides of the circle influence each other continuously. How objects are seen is influenced by prior knowledge and historicity, but what is seen is also influential. That is, objects of consciousness (the known, or perceived) have immutable qualities that, as humans with particular set of biological characteristics (the knowers, or perceivers), we see and understand in similar ways. A termite, for example, has quite a different experience of a wooden chair than we do. Heidegger said that interpretation is carried out by a being-in-the-world that is interpreting a phenomena-in-the-world, and that the interpreter needs to constantly attend to her interpretational stance (Franklin, 2013). I am in constant relationship with the objects of my perception, and part of that ‘I’ is my accumulated conscious and non-conscious knowledge (my pre-understanding or historicity). If I can be aware of both sides of the arc, my horizons can expand with deeper understanding and insight. To interpret, etymologically, is to go between (Pollio & Humphreys, 1996), and as an interpreter, I hope to expand the horizons of my readers as well.

Another requisite for the expansion of my perceptual horizon is seeing the object of study. What I see is not only influenced by pre-understanding, but *how* I see is influenced by it as

well. Part of the manner in which humans see has been influenced by science, in which the observer assumes an outside stance of objectivity. Many people in western democracies, particularly the college-educated, are biased such that they tend to see a world full of objects, rather than relationship (Haidt, 2012). Henrich, Heine, and Nornzayan (2010) refer specifically to a group of people they call WEIRD: western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic. Their intent was to challenge findings in extant literature that generalized across populations; i.e., a study whose sample is composed of college students does little to tell us about happiness generally. Descartes' philosophical project to split the body and mind, originally intended as a way to allow scientists to do research on the human body (without being damned to hell), has deeply influenced the ways in which many conceive themselves in the world: the mind and body are separate objects, each worthy of isolated study. In the world of research, quantitative analysis can at times miss the forest for the trees. Part of the appeal of phenomenology for me is that phenomenological analysis seeks to be aware of the relationship between the parts and the whole.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010) said that objectification divides us from experience and denies us of the communion of perception (pp. 373-374). He worked specifically on some of the problems caused by the mind-body split with careful attention to the experience of the phantom limb, for example (2010, pp. 88-102). Because of our biases, to see what is in front of us is a difficult task. But attempting to do so can open us to a world of new understanding.

Phenomenological Research

The philosophical ideas discussed above are the basis for the epistemology and ontology of phenomenological research. As a phenomenologist, I seek in my research to describe the pre-reflected experience of humans in relation to some phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 2014). Like many phenomenological researchers, whether they are more closely aligned with transcendental or interpretive phenomenology, I embrace Husserl's phrase, "To the things themselves!" (e.g., Ihde, 1986 p. 29; Willis, 2001, p. 1) as a call to action for research orientation. In order to have access to the world of pre-reflected, bodily lived experience, phenomenologists ask questions that orient study participants to times when the connection was most apparent. We all have some set of scientific ideas about sunsets, for example, but a phenomenologist might ask us about a sunset so powerful that we *felt it* rather than ask us about *general aspects* of sunsets.

For phenomenologists such as van Manen (2014), the feelings and descriptions of phenomena help reveal the world-as-lived despite the fact that all accounts of experience are reflective and reconstructed. The reconstruction in reflection can serve to illuminate meaning in a way that is *more* rather than less, illustrative of the meaning such phenomena have for participants. In the moment, meaning is not always clear; a participant may have been acting impulsively or in a reactionary way. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010) explains, "our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of involvement" (p. xvi). Reflection allows the participant to share what an experience was like, not strictly what happened, and in so doing, "prevail over [the experience's] facticity" (p. xvi).

With a number of interviews, researchers can discover broad experiential patterns and/or illuminating stories that provide a window into the meaning of a particular phenomenon in the form of a thematic structure. The results are not isolated pieces of information related to a phenomenon (which can be useful) or theoretical critiques of a phenomenon (which can also be useful)—they are a window into the first-person world of participants and reveal meaning of a phenomenon as lived. They bring to life the essence of the phenomenon of the study.

Methods

In the Table 1, I provide an overview of the phenomenological methods I used in this study. Subsequently I explain the steps in detail and compare them to typical procedures advocated by phenomenological methodologists. Table 1, below, has been divided into three segments: study preparation, data analysis, and writing.

Study Preparation.

As discussed in Chapter 1, and mentioned more briefly above, I joined the Phenomenology and Existentialism in Education Research (PEER) group while I was taking EPP. To prepare for my dissertation, I focused my comprehensive exam on classroom climate. I was unclear at the time exactly what my focus would be and how it would differ from other studies within PEER and in education research generally. The review of literature of classroom climate revealed a gap in literature regarding the student experience of other students. I was surprised to find that even after four years of involvement with PEER, the question of student-student interaction had never occurred to me, and it was exciting.

Table 1. Procedures

Category	Step	Processes	Description
Study Preparation	1	Review of Literature	Primarily part of my comprehensive examinations, but continued throughout analysis and writing phases.
	2	Question formation	Worked with PEER and interpretive research group to refine question.
	3	Bracketing	Participated in a bracketing interview. Wrote various bracketing statements.
	4	Collecting Data	Sought permission from principal investigators from larger PEER study, IRB. Uploaded documents to MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015).
	5	Auditing	Listened to class session audio files while reading over field notes, made corrections and additions to correspond to audio.
	6	Selecting Relevant Descriptions from Data	Read and re-read the transcripts of post-class reflections, focus groups, and interviews, looking for text in which students mention other students, one of their contributions, or the impact of other students generally.
Data Analysis	7	Identifying meaning units	Coded transcripts <i>in vivo</i> , looking for what stood out to me, idiosyncrasies, metaphors, and patterns.
	8	Secondary coding	Second level of coding included categorizations such as specific, general, personal story, etc.
	9	Transcribing specific SEOS	Located referenced student contributions, transcribed them, entered transcriptions into MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015).
	10	Individual Imaginative Variation	Engaged in individual imaginative variation: used bracketing to run parallel tracks of thought regarding SEOS: What did I experience? What did the participant experience? What was and was not written or said?
	11	Group Imaginative Variation	Took transcripts to group to be read aloud with group. Engaged in meaning unit identification, interpretation, and imaginative variation.

Table 1. Procedures Continued

	12	Thematic Structure Creation	Generated themes based on meaning units and imaginative variation. Created summary statements by class session and by participant. Synthesized summary statements to create a figure representing the thematic structure of the SEOS.
	13	Thematic Structure Revision	Shared preliminary interpretations with the research group and used their feedback to ensure I continued to bracket and to ensure they found my claims plausible. Created a final thematic structure of SEOS represented by a figure.
Writing Results	14	Writing	Wrote results and discussion with transparency, rigor, and “voking” in mind.

I did most of my reviewing of relevant literature before beginning the study, but some phenomenologists recommend waiting until after a study is complete. This may allow for some efficiency in that researchers do not know before a study begins what participants will discuss. But Thomas and Pollio (2002) argue that “prior to undertaking any research project, one needs to survey what is already known, and not yet known, about a phenomenon” (p. 46). Through my comprehensive exams, I gained a comprehensive view of the “lay of the land” before collecting descriptions.

A key for phenomenology (and by extension phenomenological questions) is an attitudinal stance of wonder: Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010), quoting Fink, declares, “The best formulation of the [phenomenological] reduction is...of ‘wonder’ in the face of the world” (p. xv). As van Manen (2014) says, wonder is the state of awe or perplexity. As an instructor and

researcher, the ways students experienced other students was a facet of classroom climate I did not previously consider that was right under my nose.

I worked with PEER to refine my research question as recommended by Thomas and Pollio (2002). I began with a series of questions inspired by my review of literature, some of which were less phenomenological, but with feedback from PEER and my dissertation committee, I was able to focus on the single question, “What is the thematic structure of the student experience of other students?” This refinement of question is the first step in bracketing: questions often restrict the definition of a phenomenon, and such restrictions can dramatically affect the quality of phenomenological investigations. Bracketing is a key element of preparation for the study, and I discuss my bracketing procedures in detail in the next section.

Gathering descriptions. With my research question devised, the next step was to gather descriptions. I begin here with some methodological discussion of gathering descriptions, and then discuss bracketing. I then describe the methods used to gather descriptions for the larger PEER study of EPP, and how I selected relevant data from the corpus available for my dissertation.

Polkinghorne (1989) says the researcher is to gather descriptions, not depictions. Worldly explanations that depict experience are a level removed from the phenomena. As mentioned above, a description of sunsets that included information about when they happen, the earth’s rotation, and how the wavelength of light influences the sky color would not be desirable to a phenomenologist for its “factual” content: As Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker and Mulderij (1984) say, such descriptions may be sufficient for common conversation, but “For [phenomenological]

research purposes...it is not enough to leave it at that. We want...to get back to what it is like...when we are having the experience, to bring into awareness what has been taken for granted” (p. 4). A phenomenologist would like to see a description that included thoughts and feelings in relation to a specific sunset.

The bracketing interview. For Thomas and Pollio (2002), the first description gathered for each study is from the researcher, who participates in a “bracketing interview.” Depending on the study, researchers will answer their interview question or describe what they expect to learn from their study. Other bracketing exercises can include written reflections on the researcher’s theoretical knowledge on the topic of study. As described above, bracketing is a process of taking on an attitude of wonder and suspending what is “known.” As defined by Thomas and Pollio (2002), bracketing “is an intellectual activity in which one tries to put aside theories, knowledge, and assumptions about a phenomenon” (p. 33). It is through bracketing that the researcher can take on the attitudinal stance necessary to gain phenomenological insights. The largest obstacle to learning new things is an assumption of knowledge.

I was interviewed by an experienced member of the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group (UTPRG) with the question, “What stands out to you in your experience of others in EPP?” Among other findings from this interview, it was clear that I was impressed with the intelligence of others in the course. In addition to the bracketing interview, I kept an ongoing bracketing journal that included bracketing specific to each participant. For example, early in the research process, I labeled one of the participants a “jock.” During the analysis phase, I made sure that such impressions from my experience did not influence what

other students reported about each other. To maintain a sense of wonder regarding SEOS throughout the research project, I attempted to set aside what I thought I knew about participants and the course.

Other descriptions and data sources. For this study, many descriptions had already been gathered. After my initial bracketing processes, I began the next phases of the project. Below I describe the setting, participants, and other data sources. Data were collected during the fall semesters of 2010 and 2011. I limited my data to that collected in the fall of 2011. The original intent of data collection was to study the experience of being a learner in EPP (see Sohn et al., 2016) and to document the planning practices of the instructor (see Franklin, 2013). Data were collected through various means after obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and participant consent. For my study, I obtained permission from IRB and the principal investigators on that project and approval to use dis-identified data from the IRB. My study drew on five of the principal sources of data from the original study: class session audio recordings, class session field notes, post-class reflections, individual post-course interviews, and end-of-course focus groups.

Setting and participants. The setting of my study was a course taught at a large land-grant university in the southeastern United States. The course was an elective graduate seminar, held weekly in a large classroom with windows on two of the walls and chalkboards lining the other two. Desks were arranged in a rectangle so that all participants (including the instructor) were seated on the same level and could see each other. Tape recorders were present on two ends of the classroom for each class session.

Table 2. Data Sources

Data Source	Quantity	Description	Example
Audio	Approximately 45 hours.	Audio recording of 15 class sessions.	N/A
Field Notes	Approximately 120 pages.	Notes from 2 graduate student non-participant observers describing what was said and by whom, also paralinguistic features such as laughter and silence.	“HP-The nature of knowing someone is different. Blake: Facebook economy—leads to pseudo-relationships”
Post-Class Reflections	248 reflections consisting of 992 total items, 105 pages transcribed.	Written reports from students after each class describing what stood out to them from each class session.	During the interview demonstrations, a lot of interesting personally meaningful content to the descriptions... The topic being described was ordinary and every day, but there was a lot of psychologically powerful stuff in the descriptions themselves. (Phil)
Focus Groups	2 interviews, Approximately 3 hours total, 51 pages transcribed.	There were two focus groups during the 13 th class session, one with 8 participants, the second with 9 participants.	George: This- This whole class has made me think about, you know, what my motives were or goals when I went into the course and then, you know, what I got out of the course. A lot of what folks here have said. Um, I found because of my peers, because of all of you, [pause] I saw a lot of different ways of being, some similar ways of being that made me feel okay with who I am. And, I really wanted to- I developed a desire to really want to grow and change...
Individual Interviews	8 interviews, approximately 8 hours, 197 pages transcribed.	Individuals were asked about being learners in the course, what they knew, and what they wanted to know after the course.	Kari Ann: I mean of course I like that we all sat in a circle. I liked that we kept our name tags so that we could actually call each other by name even if we were using all of our mental powers to memorize our student’s names in class and so it’s hard to remember everybody’s name....

The course was entitled Existential Phenomenological Psychology (EPP). Class sessions were three hours long and included many activities and discussions. Participants included 21 enrolled students, two professor participant-observers, two graduate student participant-observers, and the instructor. The instructor was a professor emeritus and taught the course 28 times over a period of 30 years. He encouraged students to come to class prepared and assured students they all would receive an A. He used a phenomenological pedagogy (Franklin, 2013) that applied principles of the philosophy's ontology and epistemology to his classroom practices. This included planning in a flexible manner with specific goals for what students could experience through discussion, demonstrations, and phenomenological practices. Students came from the fields of sports psychology, clinical psychology, counseling, business, nursing, education, philosophy, and educational psychology. The youngest participant was in the final year of his undergraduate studies in psychology and the oldest was the instructor. Most participants were between the ages of 25 and 55.

In this study, as is typical for studies associated with the UTPRG, the most important criterion for participant selection was that they experienced the phenomena under investigation (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In this case, that experience is EPP, a course in which the participation rate was 95%³. Most phenomenological studies have from around 5 to 20 participants. When researchers begin to see a repetition of themes, they do at least two more interviews. If no new

³ Percentage based on present students speaking in whole group at least once divided by total present students for 15 class sessions.

themes are seen, no more interviews are conducted (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In this study, however, these procedures are moot. There were 21 enrolled students, and eight of them agreed to be interviewed. Had there been some great disparity among the eight individual interviewees, other participants would have been sought.

Although I was one of the interviewers for the individual interviews, I did not control any of the initial study design. Below I report what was done, and why, as a research team member. Beginning with the section on “data auditing,” I designed the study. The post-class reflections, focus groups, and individual interviews were designed with the phenomenological importance of description in mind.

Each class session of the 2011 fall semester was recorded using digital audio recorders. Two graduate students recorded field notes for each class session. They attempted to note when participants spoke and the topic of their utterances. They noted other features of the class such as laughter, silence, and non-audible features like writing on the blackboard or artifacts introduced such as handouts or visual aids. Since I participated in the course, I also have my notes from class, in which I wrote observations and insights. Field notes and audio were key in my ability to make this dissertation a phenomenological case study.

After each class session, participants were asked to fill out a post-class reflection form. The form included the following language: “Please list three things that stood out for you in class today. Please describe, in as much detail as you choose, what you were aware of during one of the items you listed above.”

In other phenomenological studies (e.g., Dellard, 2013; Thweatt & Pollio, 2000) participants are asked to respond in writing to a prompt that asks for a description of an experience. While easier to arrange than an interview, and a potential source for quality descriptions, one disadvantage for the researcher with such reflections is there is no possibility to ask for clarification or further elaboration (Sohn & Skutnik, 2014). In this study, post-class reflections offered a more idiosyncratic view of what stood out to students than focus groups and individual interviews.

During the second to last class session, the class split into two groups and part of the time was devoted to two focus group interviews conducted by the two professor participant-observers. These professors had extensive experience in phenomenological interviewing and began with the question, “What specific things stand out for you from your experience in this course?” They mainly listened to participant responses, but sometimes asked for further clarification or description.

Focus groups allow participants to “emphasize things that stand out to them and build on one another’s comments to provide an overall picture of the phenomenon” (Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2006, p. 259). While some methodologists worry that focus groups silence less dominant members of the group (e.g., Sim, 1998), discussion patterns in these focus groups were relatively balanced between participants.

After the conclusion of the course, participants were asked if they would like to be interviewed individually about their experience in the course. Eight of the participants agreed. Interviewers were three graduate students, including myself, and one professor observer-

participant. The phenomenological interviews were open-ended and began with the question, “What was it like to be a learner in this class?” Interviewers participated in bracketing interviews before interviewing participants.

Phenomenological interviews (Thomas & Pollio, 2002) seek to capture the lived experience of the participants and so interviewers had one main question that was designed to elicit descriptions from the participants and allow them to describe their experiences freely. Interviewers avoided leading questions and only asked further questions to follow up or clarify participant statements. Interviewers attempted to capture pre-reflective participant experiences by having questions that focused on descriptions rather than explanations. It is from the above data sources that I selected the data relevant for my study and began analysis.

Data preparation. Before beginning the first steps of analysis, I listened to the audio of each class session and checked to see that the participant-observers noted each student contribution. This served as a guide to the audio recordings to assist in later steps of the data analysis process.

I then read and re-read the transcripts of post-class reflections, focus groups, and interviews, looking for text in which students mentioned other students, one of their contributions, or the impact of other students generally, for example, a discussion or conversation. The goal of this step was to identify the data relevant to this study. Other phenomenological studies served as a precedent for reexamining the data (Thomas, Phillips, Gunther, 2013). This delimitation of the data could have lead to losses in terms of seeing parts in relation to the whole. For example, student comments related to grades and grading procedures

are unlikely to relate to other students. Yet students did remark that the atmosphere was “non-competitive,” and the absence of grades is an aspect of the course that students could have associated with non-competitiveness. So rather than cut out what could have been seen as irrelevant to SEOS, I simply bolded transcript text that included SEOS. In this way I was able to continue bracketing: rather than assume non-competitiveness was related to grades, I could see if participants ever linked the two (which they did).

Data Analysis.

Post-class reflections, focus group interviews, and individual interviews were transcribed verbatim. Class session audio recordings and field notes were in original form. Data collection was guided by the approach to phenomenology specified in Thomas and Pollio (2002). The analysis combined phenomenological analysis with case study analysis. Case study methods do not preclude or prescribe specific methods (Flyvberg, 2011), rather the methods are suited to the questions and the case. In this section I describe my methods (principally taken from Thomas and Pollio, 2002) and how they differ from other forms of phenomenology

I uploaded all transcripts to MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015). The steps of analysis are listed below in Table 3 and detailed in text that follows. These steps should be taken as approximate. As in any creative endeavor, the process was iterative and at times did not follow a specific sequence (Cross, 2011). Insight can come at any moment, and the abductive leap (Cross, 2011; van Manen, 2014) required to formulate a theme or move from primary text to theory cannot be bound by a lock-step procedure. What is presented below is not inaccurate, however, and can be taken as a general outline of how the study proceeded.

Table 3. Data Analysis Procedures

Category	Step	Processes	Description
Data Analysis	7	Identifying meaning units	Coded transcripts <i>in vivo</i> , looking for what stood out to me, idiosyncrasies, metaphors, and patterns.
	8	Secondary coding	Second level of coding included categorizations such as specific, general, personal story, etc.
	9	Transcribing specific SEOS	Located referenced student contributions, transcribed them, entered transcriptions into MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015).
	10	Individual Imaginative Variation	Engaged in individual imaginative variation: used bracketing to run parallel tracks of thought regarding SEOS: What did I experience? What did the participant experience? What was and was not written or said?
	11	Group Imaginative Variation	Took transcripts to group to be read aloud together. Engaged in meaning unit identification, interpretation, and imaginative variation.
	12	Thematic Structure Creation	Generated themes based on meaning units and imaginative variation. Created summary statements by class session and by participant. Synthesized summary statements to create a figure representing the thematic structure of the SEOS.

Identifying meaning units. Phenomenological methodologists commonly go back to Heidegger's etymology of analysis (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; van Manen, 2014): we want to "loosen the strings" of the phenomenon. Unlike constant comparative analysis, in which sections of text are at times literally chopped up and categorized immediately, phenomenologists code differently. Coding in phenomenology is often referred to as identifying "meaning units" (Polkinghorne, 1989; Robbins, 2006; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In this study, I began by identifying passages that "stood out to me" in the transcripts, as recommended by Thomas and Pollio (2002).

This approach to identifying meaning units, common among researchers in the UTPRG, is different than two major influences in contemporary phenomenology. For Polkinghorne (1989) and Giorgi (1997), a perspective is taken that the researcher has a set of knowledge of the field the participant lacks, and so participant statements can be categorized based on, for example, theories regarding student-teacher interactions. A transcript can be split into MUs of varying lengths, and the researcher states overall what the MU is about in the words of the field. These nomothetic labels are called transformations. A short reflection to describe the “discovery” is written and the transformation is “interrogated” in terms of the topic under study (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 54). After repeating this process for all the MUs in all study transcripts, a general statement is written for all transcripts that fall within a group. According to Polkinghorne (1989), “The transformations are necessary because the original descriptions given by subjects are usually naive regarding psychological structures and often include multiple and blended references” (p. 55). But life has multiple and blended references, and rather than idiosyncrasies that need to be controlled, inconsistencies can reveal meaning in a way that will be missed if MUs are transformed.

Van Manen (2014) and Todres and Galvin (2008) talk of another kind of transformation: they manipulate participant stories to make them “more resonant,” to give them more of what van Manen (2014), borrowing from Barthes, calls *punctum*, or sting. They have adopted a “never let the truth get in the way of a good story” attitude based on the idea that what historically-factually-empirically occurred is inconsequential to creating a sense of the meaning of a phenomenon. While some criticize participant word manipulation for a lack of factuality,

adherents of the Thomas and Pollio (2002) branch of phenomenology take issue with the presumption that the researcher's words are more universal or evocative than the participants'. From the Duquesne school of phenomenology participants have words put over them, and from other more interpretive schools, words put into their mouths.

These transformations presume that either participants do not know what they are talking about or they do not talk about it in an artful enough way. But nomothetic titles and poetic rewording distract from the rich meaning that is already there and compromise bracketing in that a theoretical or artful assumption is made about what the participant said.

Alternatively, I label meaning units with the words of the participants, as recommended by Thomas and Pollio (2002). This process is commonly referred to as *in vivo* coding. The MU can be whatever "stands out" to the researcher as descriptions are read from interview transcript texts, but idiosyncrasies, metaphors, and patterns are common elements of MUs. Researchers explore the MU both independently and in its relation to the whole text. For example, the following passage, taken from data for this study and selected as relevant to SEOS, is an excerpt from an interview that began with the question, "What is it like to be a learner in this course?"

For a graduate level course, it it wasn't a um competition of, you know, who can, who can, be the cleverest in the class or who can um, out do one another. There wasn't that, it was very collaborative feeling we were continually, you know, listening to one another, validating what people were saying. (Kari Ann, individual interview)

This entire segment was labeled as a meaning unit, and within it, “it wasn’t a... competition,” “it was very collaborative feeling,” and “we were continually...listening to one another, validating what people were saying,” were also codes I created. In MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015), coding MUs was a process of highlighting a certain segment of text in the transcribed documents and dragging a label to it. The labels were names of codes.

Soon after beginning the process of *in vivo* coding, a clear distinction in the meaning units emerged. Participants mentioned other participants or participant contributions specifically or generally. For example, the following is a phrase that *generally* spoke of other students: “What made the class even more special is the diversity of students we’ve got in this class.” (Sonia, focus group interview). The following is an example of a specific mention of another student: “Meg’s introduction w/ 9/11 brother. Haiti earthquake victims” (Brian, post-class reflection, Class 1). This statement was one of the “three things that stood out” on a post-class reflection. Because of this distinction, meaning units were coded in MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015) as either specific or general. In rare situations where both the instructor and students contributed something that was mentioned by a participant, I noted in an analytic memo within MAXQDA.

I searched for standout phrases, metaphors, and patterns. With the example above from Sonia, I added a code “diversity of students.” Throughout the coding process, I considered how the coded segment related to the whole of its context in order to avoid decontextualizing the meaning statements had for students. MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015) is designed such that the context of a coded segment can be retrieved with a single mouse click.

When a student mentioned a specific SEOS, I used the field notes to find the utterances mentioned in the audio recordings. I then transcribed these utterances and entered them into MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015) to assist with imaginative variation (see below for discussion). In the example from Brian above, I found the audio of the story by Meg and transcribed it.

From the Heideggerian perspective, labeling meaning units is the hermeneutic circle at work: based on researchers' pre-understandings, different words and phrases will be meaningful in different ways. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) describe it in terms of gestalt psychology and figure-ground relationships. My goal in the coding was to maintain the view of the whole while exploring what was figural and what was ground. While coding, I documented my thoughts I had as I read the transcripts in memos, which served as documentation of my imaginative variation.

Imaginative variation. *In vivo* coding generated hundreds of codes, and for them to be useful in my analysis, I wrote analytic memos and added categorical codes in association with them. I directed my thinking about the meaning units in a process referred to as imaginative variation.

Polkinghorne (1989) describes the process as a “type of mental experimentation in which the researcher intentionally alters, through imagination, various aspects of the experience....The point...is to imaginatively stretch the proposed transformation until it no longer describes the experience underlying the subject's naïve description” (p. 55). Imaginative variation helps draw

a line between what could be within participant experience and what could not. A specific example from Churchill's (2006) study of being joyful gives a picture of the process:

When I encounter what seems to be a common theme among the protocols, I imagine what would happen if that theme were absent from the experience of being joyful...when I consider the theme of joy as "life-affirming," I feel confident that it is a general theme, because I cannot imagine an experience of joy that is not...an affirmation of life. However, when I consider...the theme of achieving a personal goal, I can imagine an experience of joy that emerges without such an achievement. For example, in aimless play, a person can experience joy without achieving any goal whatsoever. (p. 191)

One of the advantages of having been a student in the course is that I was able to revisit my notes and the audio recording of the specific SEOS. This allowed a kind of imaginative variation rarely possible in phenomenological studies. In a sense, I was able to sit down beside the participants and relive the incident, comment, or personal story they highlighted as standing out. I read and re-read the class session transcripts identified as specific SEOS. I categorized the incidents using imaginative variation and recorded my impressions of how the participants experienced the incidents. I recalled my experience of the incident, or noted that I did not recall it. I recorded my reaction to the incident. I considered how the student contribution *could have been experienced* and how students *say they experienced it*. For example, certain incidents stood out to more than one participant. In each case I compiled all the different ways it was taken, or experienced.

Imaginative variation generates more descriptions: my descriptions of my experience of the SEOS, reaction to the meaning units, and how they relate to others. I created a special memo for each participant statement coded “specific” that served as a documentation of my imaginative variation and basis for thematization. I noted what I saw in the meaning unit based on my experience of the incident and pre-understandings related to classroom climate and transformative learning. In this step I looked for what stood out to me and I retained the words of the participants in code titles in order to continue bracketing and leave open the possibility that the meaning of the utterance for the participant was different than its meaning for me.

To bracket during the steps involving imaginative variation, I directed my thinking with numerous parallel lines of thought—this was my way of “suspending” what I knew in terms of, for example, research regarding safe classroom climates or the general experience of others (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997)—and put myself in the place of the participant or other participants.

Table 4. Imaginative Variation

What the participant expressed (specific SEOS): “The discussion mainly made me think about the relational quality of ‘special places’ including and especially my experiences with my best friend and the chair I sat in” (Ingrid, post-class reflection, Class 9).		
Three parallel lines of thinking regarding the specific SEOS:		
My pre-understandings.	My experience of the incident.	What the participant may have meant.
A discussion, a special place, a best friend, location in relation to best friends.	I enjoyed the discussion of special places and remember that I thought about my paternal grandparents’ home and summer camp.	People make a place special. Special places make it easier to be relational. That even the seat she sits in is special because she took the EPP course with a friend the first time she took it, and she is sitting in her seat. Is the friend dead? Was the course a meaningful part of their friendship?

In this study, along with my own imaginative variation, I took a selection of transcripts to the interpretive research group at The University of Tennessee, and we read a selection of SEOS transcripts and described together what about the texts stood out. The group was composed of people from various disciplines and of various ages including experienced faculty, graduates, graduate students, and at times undergraduate students. Any group member, whether a newcomer to the group or a long-time attendee, can contribute to a form of social imaginative variation that includes further descriptions and connections to previous studies or literature. In this way the group reading can generate material for literature review, discussion, and help determine themes.

The process I followed included taking the bracketing interview transcript to the interpretive research group and several SEOS transcripts. This process not only expands the hermeneutic circle and broadens the potential figure/ground relationships that can be interpreted, it also serves to assist the researcher with further bracketing. If an interpretation is suggested that other members of the group can not see evidence for in the transcript, it is abandoned. The perspectives of others broaden the horizons of the hermeneutic circle and gain further transparency and rigor.

For example, the SEOS transcript of Mark was read with the interpretive research group, and members offered imaginative variation as shown in Table 5 with selections from a particular meaning unit below.

In the example in Table 5, what can be seen is that the individual imaginative variation can be more extensive both because of the time constraints of the interpretive research group and

Table 5. Specific Imaginative Variation

Meaning Unit from Mark SEOS transcript	Imaginative variation contributed by interpretive research group members	My imaginative variation
I thought the discussion about falling asleep was interesting. That we imitate the act of sleeping in order to fall asleep. Recent research has shown that you can make yourself happier just by smiling more which is what I was reminded of. This really underscores the body/mind connection, or being-in-the-world as your body can interact with the mind as much as the opposite in fact because they are an inseparable unit.	Mark connects a discussion to research he is aware of. This is somewhat of an application. This passage reminded one group member of an essence of phenomenology, which is to avoid categories. He cited the novelist John Irving, "Don't put me in a category until you get to know me."	Mark is referring to a specific discussion involving the instructor and Sonia. She suffers from insomnia. For Mark this SEOS is a "discussion" and it "reminds" him of research. He connects it to course content, "being-in-the-world." He could have experienced empathy for Sonia in the moment, he could have experienced dismay, he could have been impressed that Sonia was someone with an insomnia problem and still was contributing to class discussion in an interesting way, but his description is focused little on her and more on the "body/mind" connection.
Interesting	Mark often stated interest. Rarely does his interest seem emotionally profound.	He uses interesting, and in another instance enlightening. These are more cognitive than perhaps fascinating or moving, words used by other participants to describe discussions. For Mark interest may be a word that has emotional connotation. There were a few occasions when he used stronger language.
What I was reminded of	Discussions made Mark turn inward to his own prior knowledge in various instances in the transcript. His focus is intellectual.	Mark mentioned things he knew/thought, including his own class contributions. More self-oriented than some participants.

because I as the individual researcher benefit from the contributions of the interpretive research group.

The process of imaginative variation has as its goal a move from idiographic to nomothetic “discovery” (Polkinghorne, 1989) or “insight” (van Manen, 2014). Through my own imaginative variation and the imaginative variation and feedback from the interpretive research group, I immersed myself in the data and the SEOS of others and myself. This immersion served me in the synthesis required for thematization.

Thematization. The meaning units and associated imaginative variation are the basis for themes. For Thomas and Pollio (2002), themes describe “broad experiential patterns” and oftentimes metaphors used by participants supply the kind of poetic language necessary to give themes meaning beyond the idiosyncratic experience of an individual participant. For van Manen (2014) the development of themes is a process that requires “insight” and an “abductive leap” (p. 345-346). While many methodologists are challenged in their attempts to describe the process by which knowledge is generated, van Manen combines a discussion of “active passivity” and “passive activity” with evidence from neuroscience to support his call for taking time to be immersed in the data. For me, I did not always see the broad experiential patterns during the processes described in this chapter (the moments of active activity and purposeful engagement with the data). In times of passive activity or active passivity—driving, teaching, cooking, playing with my son, walking—I gained insights to develop themes.

For Polkinghorne (1989), theme names are to be “discoveries” using theoretical names to indicate what the patterns in the data are. But I used participant words for themes (Thomas &

Pollio, 2002) as part of an overall emphasis on respect for the participants. As Willis (2001) pointed out, this approach

Brings to view the subjective states and interpretations of people who have engaged in a common experience...and which may have been overlooked or repressed by powerful interests in society. The focus is on the subject; it protects and values the contributions of various subjects engaged in life experiences. (p. 7)

It is this focus on empathy and respect that makes existential hermeneutic phenomenology appropriate for fields like nursing and education, yet other fields, like marketing, also benefit from studies in which participant stories are respected, rather than chopped up to support pre-existing ideas for what sells or deconstructed to reveal a priori formal theories.

The goal of the coding, imaginative variation, and the interpretive research group process is to identify broad experiential patterns (Thomas & Pollio, 2002) associated with the study phenomenon. “Broad experiential patterns” require no particular percentage of participants, although some phenomenologists, perhaps to appeal to a more conventional scientific audience, have proposed such qualifications (for a discussion, see Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p. 37). But phenomenological themes are meant to reveal phenomenon in a novel way, and at times a single participant may offer such a powerful description of one aspect of a phenomenon that it is included. The choice to include such themes is in the judgment of the researcher. In the current study, for example, only three participants (out of 21) specifically said they “missed” other participants when they were not there. But their statements reflect an important aspect of the SEOS, and I include them in my results.

Before generating themes for the entire SEOS, I crafted summary statements of themes for individual participants. For example, for Mark, one of the themes that extended to the entire SEOS was, “Seeing Variations.” One of the themes that I did not include in the final structure was, “Interest.” Many participants used the term interesting at one point or another, including Mark, but in general, statements would reveal little other than, for example, “I found the discussion interesting.”

Themes, when proposed, must be supported by the data in such a way that readers, adopting the stance presented by the researcher, can see the logic that governed the decision (whether or not they agree with the interpretation). For example, with the quote from Sonia above, the code “diversity of students” appeared in other forms for other participants and was eventually collapsed into the code “seeing variations,” a poetic and phenomenological statement made by Barbara. This amalgamation of in vivo codes into a single code aided me in moving from the idiosyncratic participant experiences to the thematic structure. An example of the moves I made to go from codes to themes is provided in Appendix A. One element of this structure was that through others’ perspectives, students were able to “see variations” in the phenomenological sense of the expansion of the hermeneutic circle horizon.

I shared preliminary interpretations with the research group. As described above, the members of the group contributed significantly with their feedback, interpretations, and guidance. They also helped me continue to bracket and checked that my findings were plausible. From these interpretations I created a thematic structure represented by a figure (See Chapter 4)—a not uncommon practice among the UTPRG (See Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). The

thematic structure represents the essence of the phenomenon in figure-ground terms. The ground is the context in which the phenomenon's figural themes stand out. The final analysis presented a thematic structure of the student experience of other students in a graduate seminar.

Having detailed my analysis methods, the next step was to write my findings for the public. Before describing the methods that guided my writing, I turn briefly to the issue of qualitative data analysis software (QDAS). QDAS programs such as MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015) have become common tools used to manage the complex processes of qualitative research. These programs have subtle differences, but most of the programs offer similar functions that assist researchers in the disaggregation and recontextualization of texts (Davidson and di Gregorio, 2011). QDAS users can all upload textual and picture documents, tag text or areas of pictures with labels, and run search queries with logic functions like AND, OR, or NOR. I used MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015) throughout my dissertation project and found it a helpful tool.

Phenomenology and QDAS.

Phenomenological methodologists tend to neglect the means by which phenomenology is carried out. Most authors suggest reading and re-reading texts and put forth careful explanations of the reduction's attitudinal stance or guides to ways of thinking, but do not sufficiently explain the tools to be used: paper, pencil, computer? The few mentions of QDAS (Goble, Austin, Larsen, Kreitzer, & Brintnell, 2012; van Manen, 2014) argue that such technology is not compatible with phenomenology.

For van Manen (2014), using “special software” may facilitate thematic analysis in such genres as grounded theory or ethnography, “but these are not the ways of doing phenomenology” (p. 319). He goes on to say that coding, abstracting, and generalization cannot produce phenomenological insight. Yet his methods are described as a way of familiarizing oneself with the data, and whether one reads the data from a book or computer screen, familiarization occurs. I readily admit that the tools used in a project shape it, but one is not prevented from thinking carefully by the presence or absence of a computer.

Goble, Austin, Larsen, Kreitzer, & Brintnell (2012) expand van Manen’s argument by invoking McLuhan’s “medium is the message” and Heidegger’s views on technology as a dehumanizing element and state that the work of phenomenology is inevitably transformed, and for the worse, with the use of QDAS. But Goble et al. admit that the primary researchers did not know how to use QDAS and their conclusions, such as “with QDAS we become certain” and “with QDAS we become language-less,” are not essential to QDAS in any way. So while their protestations against the use of QDAS in phenomenology may be born of sound philosophy, they fail to convince me.

Goble et al. described the ways QDAS changed their research approach. For example, they engaged in coding for the sake of coding, rather than sticking to a more typical meaning unit identification approach. I agree with the call for caution Goble et al. issued, but how QDAS facilitated “coding for coding’s sake,” as an experienced user of QDAS, is difficult for me to understand. Circling a passage on a printed sheet of paper is less work than highlighting a passage and coding it in QDAS. QDAS takes more, not less, work on the front end of a

qualitative study. A researcher using QDAS carefully has a paper trail of thoughts (Konopasek, 2008) that can be easily revisited.

The place for caution for phenomenologists when using QDAS is in the importance of seeing the parts (the codes, in QDAS) in relation to the whole. MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015) functions such that any retrieved code can be clicked, and in another window the passage from which the code was identified appears. I share an example screen capture in Appendix B. This helps the user keep a sense of the whole.

Two recent dissertations (Dellard, 2013; Franklin, 2013) both used Atlas.ti, another QDAS, to assist in data coding and analysis. While neither of them mentioned the potential pitfalls of QDAS, they described methods consistent with phenomenology: reading, re-reading, coding, and writing analytic memos. They did not use a quill and ink to write the analytic memos, and their work held up to the scrutiny of their dissertation committees. As Franklin (2013) noted, while the coding and analysis were carried out within the Atlas.ti program, “all of the coding and categorizing choices were [her] own” (p. 82).

In this study, I used QDAS in part because my paper organization skills are poor. QDAS allowed me to have all my documents in one place. It did not prevent me from reading and re-reading. It did not prevent me from engaging in “active passivity” or “passive activity” (van Manen, 2014, pp. 345-346). I was not any less immersed (Goble et al., 2012) in the data, rather the virtual setting of the text may have assisted me in stepping out of my everyday life and into the world of the study.

Writing reports of results.

The purpose of writing up results of phenomenological (or any genre) research is to help broaden understanding of the phenomena in question. Having readers see through the eyes of study participants is one way to extend its *generalizability*. In quantitative research, generalizability often refers to the extrapolation of the sample population to the whole population. But phenomenological research “aims at meaning and understanding rather than at causality and prediction, [so] the criteria used to evaluate [it] must be cast in a different light” (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 39). The concept of transfer, a common element of learning theories (Schunk, 2012), is more appropriate. When a learner uses knowledge gained in one area to another, transfer is said to occur. Transfer requires the reader to see some kind of truth or utility in the results.

In a discussion of truth, van Manen (2014) summarizes the difference between notions of truth based on the ideas of justice and what is right (*veritas*) and truth as a revealing of meaning (*aletheia*) (pp. 342-343). Researchers in phenomenology, whether transcendental or interpretive, seek the latter notion of truth. From the plethora of knowledge and information available regarding the phenomenon of study, the phenomenological report helps the reader envision and experience a new insight or connection.

Quality in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers often struggle against the dominance of quantitative research designs and discuss the validity, reliability, and generalizability of their work. For my purposes, transparency, rigor, and resonance are more appropriate terms to describe the goals that guided my writing.

I took various steps to insure transparency. In qualitative research, transparency refers to making public and open to scrutiny the methods of analysis. MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015) serves as a repository for my thoughts and progression throughout the dissertation process with the memos and journal features. Through examining the file I am able to see a kind of “paper trail” of reactions, changes, and considerations from the beginning of the dissertation study to its end. My bracketing processes extended my transparency to a group beyond myself and my committee. I clearly spelled out my role as a participant observer and discussed what findings are my own and what findings are that of the larger research group of which I am a part. I included documentation of the process of analysis in the body of the dissertation and in greater detail in appendices.

Rigor refers to the extent to which qualitative research is exhaustive, carefully crafted, systematic, and deep (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). The multiple data sources for this study included hundreds of pages of transcripts, field notes, and other course-related documents. There were over 50 hours of audio from which I transcribed specific instances of student experience of other students. In the end I coded 2363 segments and wrote 193 analytic memos. The volume of work that went into producing the dissertation was significant.

I developed processes and followed them. I attempted to align my research methodology with my writing style. Through bracketing and the involvement of my committee and the interpretive research group, I avoided solipsistic reasoning.

The goal for the knowledge generated in this study through the phenomenological case study method is *resonance* (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). If readers in some way resonate with

the findings and discussion, if they can then appropriate some of the knowledge for their own, it will bring value to the dissertation. Van Manen (2014) discusses various ways in which readings can “voke.” Resonance relates to two of them: revocation and invocation. When readers revoke, they recall or bring back into consciousness experiences they have had that connect to and enhance what they are reading. This is one way my findings and discussion may “ring true” for a reader. I hope the reader can also find plausible, or better yet, invoke (call forth) an image of *what could be* from this dissertation for their future practice as an instructor, methodologist, or philosopher. Having the methods that guided my writing, in the next section I turn to general methodological considerations not yet explained.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Consent forms were attained and remain on file. Only members of the research team know the names of the participants. Pseudonyms were selected, and when possible participants provided them. When working with data from a larger research project care must be taken to maintain the confidentiality of participants (Foster, Hays, & Alter, 2013). After pseudonym selection, the original names of participants were no longer used. The participants in the study are not considered an at-risk group, so precautions beyond what are typically expected for preserving confidentiality are not necessary.

One ethical issue highlighted by Foster et al. (2013) regarding re-use of data is to consider whether or not the current study fits clearly enough under the umbrella of the wording of the informed consent form. Did participants agree to have their words be put to use in the

service of my research questions? In my estimation, the broad nature of the original consent form allows my study to avoid this ethical dilemma.

Reflexivity.

As indicated in the methodology section, part of my methods included a series of bracketing exercises in which I take the time to examine my perspectives and assumptions related to how students can affect a classroom climate. Of primary importance in acknowledging how I see the study are three factors: I was a participant in the course, I am an instructor who has changed his practice based on the course and subsequent research, and I plan to continue working with the PEER team on the broader study of which my study is a side project.

As a participant in the course, I experienced the classroom, its climate, and the contributions of all its participants first hand. It is this experience that sparked my interest in joining the research team, which eventually led to the formulation of this research proposal. I became a participant-observer (Labaree, 2002; Murray, 2003) two thirds of the way through the course. The ontology of phenomenology can be helpful in considering the participant-observer situation. Humans are in constant interaction with their environments: the sedimented knowledge we possess influences how we see the environment, but the environment also influences us in a hermeneutic circle. I came to grow and change in the course and as a graduate student, and the meaning of those moments when a classmate told a powerful story or laughed with me were part of the gestalt of who I was and am becoming.

The goal of bracketing was in part to identify the meaning of these changes for me. If I was unable to put my finger on it before writing this dissertation, the phenomenological attitude

helped me see how the course shaped my views on what a classroom should and could be. The most profound change I noticed was a change in being related to listening and valuing what other people in my life were saying. This change in stance was particularly helpful in my dealing with my wife's grandmother, who was suffering dementia. I felt more compassionate and connected not only to her, but also to those in my family who were care-takers day in and day out. I felt the power and efficacy of a phenomenological approach and sought to identify what factors in the course inspired this change.

As an instructor, I began changing my practice to more closely resemble the practice of the instructor of EPP. I was enamored of the experience I had, knew others in the course were as well, and wanted my students to have a similar experience. I began with in-depth introductions, a move that intended to give priority to who my students were over what we were going to study. I designed activities that required students to begin the study of, for example, motivation, with stories of times in their school experience in which they were motivated or unmotivated. I modified reflection activities to more closely resemble phenomenological questions.

This kind of advocacy made it difficult for me to find an open, compelling question in the data from EPP: I was already convinced about the instructor's practices, and in fact had already integrated them into my activities and classroom climate. What I still did not know was how students experienced each other and what that experience included.

As a member of the Phenomenology and Existentialism in Education Research group (PEER), I plan to continue to research the course and contribute my time and ideas to the development of a phenomenological framework for teaching and learning. This study will ideally

contribute to that larger project. Part of my bracketing for the dissertation was to work carefully when a conclusion that I reached seemed to fit very well within the larger framework: those kinds of claims were warranted such that non-PEER members can find the conclusions plausible.

Bracketing. I engaged in a multi-stage bracketing process that began with a self-reflection on individual participants (for results, see Chapter 1). I wrote out what I remembered from each student in the course and what contributions I recall them making, if any. I first attempted to capture my general impression of the students in the course, and then included my impressions based on my involvement in research on the course. I participated in a bracketing interview with the question, “What about your experience with others in EPP stands out for you?”

The other bracketing exercises included self-reflections on my expectations, questions, and assumptions regarding classroom climate and transformative learning. I discussed the bracketing interview in an interpretive research group in order to help me become aware of the assumptions and biases I brought to the study. As suggested in Franklin (2013), where my bracketing process revealed biases, I was sure to support related findings with substantial evidence and include the interpretive research group. As another form of bracketing, I kept a research journal in MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2015), noting where and how my biases and impressions were assisting and impeding the analysis. For example, during one phase of the research I found myself irritated with a particular participant. I noted this in the journal and revisited the analytical memos I wrote about that participant on that day to ensure my mood that day did not cloud my analysis.

Summary

In this chapter I have described some of the history of case study, phenomenology, and phenomenological case study in order to establish precedent and a logic of justification for my study and its methods. I described the methods in detail, including tables to illustrate steps in the process of collection, analysis, and writing. I then shared ethical consideration and described my positionality and methods of bracketing. Having detailed my framework and methods, in the next chapter I turn to the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

In Chapter 1, I described the need to study the student experience of other students (SEOS) in relation to classroom climate, transformative learning, and philosophy of education. In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature related to learning in classrooms through relationships and found a need for a phenomenological approach to studying student experiences of other students. In Chapter 3, I shared my phenomenological case study approach and how it was designed to help me answer my primary research question: what is the thematic structure of the SEOS in a graduate seminar? In this chapter I present the findings from my study.

I begin with an overview of my findings by describing the thematic structure of the SEOS. Next, I provide contextual information about the course by sharing transcripts of selected class session audio recordings and the student experiences of those incidents as collected from post-class reflections, focus groups, and individual interviews. In my description of the episodes I show the relationship between the elements of the thematic structure. I proceed by sharing quotes from participants to show the reader the path I followed to reach each of the themes. In the final section of this chapter I share results related to specific class sessions and individuals, highlighting differences in the SEOS. Now, I turn to the thematic structure.

The Thematic Structure

As explained in Chapter 3, a thematic structure is intended to portray the gestalt of the experience of a phenomenon, in this case, the student experience of other students. Below I will introduce the thematic structure, represented in Figure 1, and sketch its elements and their interrelationship.

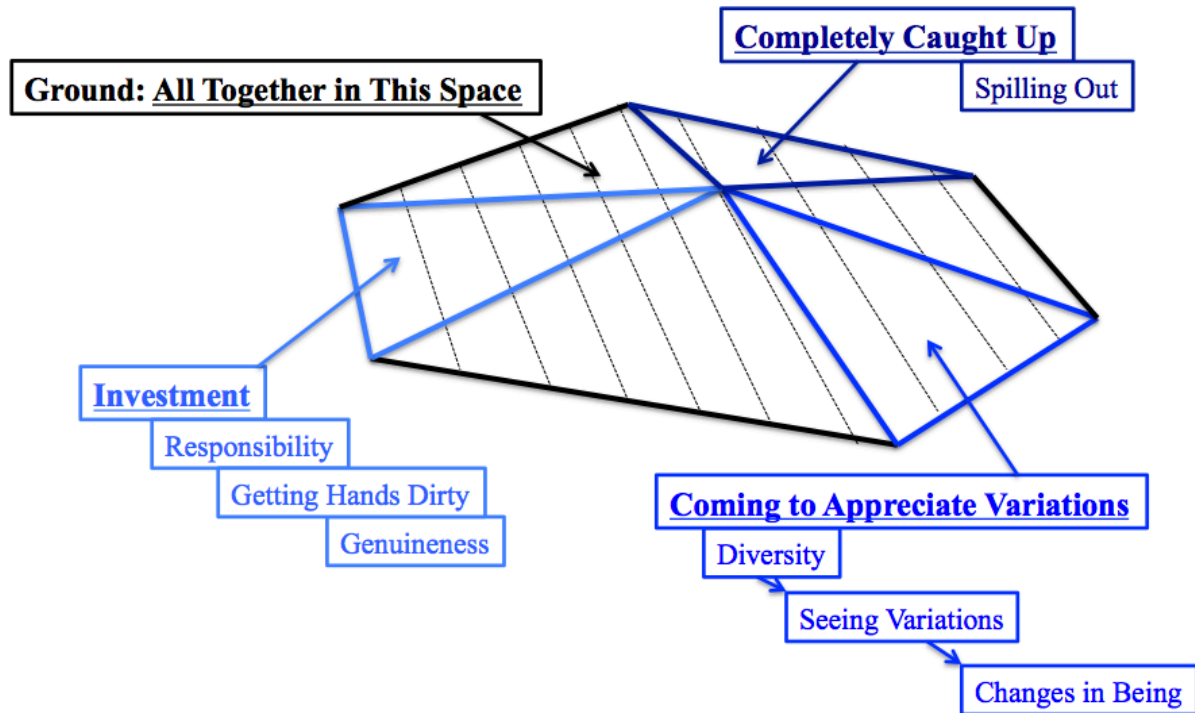


Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the SEOS

The grounding theme, the context, for the figural themes, was “*All Together in This Space*,” a theme that showed the importance students placed on each other for support and connection. From the hexagonal ground, there are three panels that represent the figural themes rising to meet at a peak. It should be noted that the base of the triangular panels make up the edges of the hexagonal ground, indicating the necessity of all the pieces in order to make the whole figure. On the left is “*Investment*,” a theme that references the time, effort, and participation students noted about each other. In their words, participants noted other students’ “*Responsibility*,” willingness to “*Get Hands Dirty*” by “messing about” or “exploring” the

content, and “*Genuineness*” of questions and involvement. Participants saw each other as invested, and with those genuine investments, participants got “*Completely Caught Up*.” This theme describes the experience of students being swept up emotionally in each other and the content of the course, for example in the activities they did together and their peers’ stories. They were caught up together and perceived a “*Spilling Out*” of course content into other areas of their lives, sometimes with others and sometimes in the form of personal applications and reflections based on other student contributions. These applications often related to the third major theme, “*Coming to Appreciate Variations*,” a progression of learning through each other participants experienced in the course. They began by noting relatively superficial attributes of others, noted as “*Diversity*.” The subtheme of “Diversity” became a starting point to understanding that differences in student origin or field related to differences in perception—participants began “*Seeing Variations*” in the phenomenological sense. In the final stage of the progression, students would engage in reflection based on “Seeing Variations” and reached the point of “*Coming to Appreciate Variations*.” It was in this stage that students would *realize* course content in their lives and experience therapeutic effects from the course and describe “*Changes in Being*” like becoming better listeners.

In the rest of this chapter I discuss these findings and illustrate them with data in the form of class transcripts and student quotes from post-class reflections, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. Along with evidence to support my findings, I also include sections that illustrate specific findings that are not easily subsumable into the thematic structure. The plethora

of data available in this study allow for a complex look at the SEOS. To begin, I share illustrative episodes that show the interconnected nature of the themes.

Illustrative Episodes of a Unique Course

After the last class session, Donna remarked on the technically unique nature of the EPP course: “we will never all be together in this space [again]” (post-class reflection, Class 15). In this section I provide illustrative class session episodes in transcript form that show how the EPP course differed from many college courses. Here I provide transcripts of several incidents from the course that were referred to by participants within their SEOS data. I include examples of (a) two personal stories told by students in the course; (b) a discussion of course material, in this case a poem; and (c) a practice research interview. Personal stories, conversations or discussions in reaction to course materials, and methodological activities such as interviewing or analyzing transcripts were three categories of incidents mentioned at least once in all participants’ reflections.

Personal Stories.

In their post-class reflections or during focus groups and interviews, participants mentioned the personal stories their classmates shared during class sessions. Some of these stories were about giving birth (Lois), deaths (Meg and George), or more daily affairs like going to the doctor (Ingrid). Below I share incidents from Lois and Meg followed by quotes from other participants’ reflections on their stories.

During the sixth class session (each class session lasted three hours and there were 15 total), which focused on the lived experience of the body, the class came to a pause of sorts and

Ingrid, a woman in her 50s, asked to hear a story about pregnancy, since she had never experienced it. After a story about nursing from one of the professor participant observers, Lois shared the story of the birth of her fifth child. The transcript follows.

Lois: Can I talk about birth and pregnancy?

EPP Instructor: Sure, you being an expert here [laughter].

Lois: Yeah, it's the one thing I think I really have some real insight into.

EPP Instructor: Well you practiced so much [laughter].

Lois: And you know what the reason that I talk about the birth of my fifth son is that it finally, I mean to say, I got it right, but there's really more to it than that. But there was much involved in that because my first four, actually it was three pregnancies, four births, I have a set of twins, and so it was a process of where with my first son, I felt like an utter failure as a woman. Because, first of all, I ended up with um, preeclampsia, ended up in the bed, they had to induce labor, and absolutely fell apart, after 20 hours, they were wheeling me all over the hospital, ended up with a cesarean, and then it went down hill from there. Um, literally, post-partum depression, nobody knew about that then, it was, I was aware of my body in ways that I hope, very few people become aware of their bodies. So it took me five years to even want to think about having another child but I definitely wanted more children and so, so then I failed at breast feeding too, 'cause they gave him sugar water, in the hospital, and that was much easier for him to get than nursing. So the second son was the exact opposite. Found a doctor

who attempted to let me have natural childbirth, but that failed again, and my husband went into the nursery, and yanked my baby- our baby out of the nursery and said, you're not keeping him in there, 'cause he had the [unintelligible] and you are not giving him any sugar water, the only thing that baby's gonna have is his mother's milk, so we uh caused a little bit of a stir, but again,

EPP Instructor: I'll bet [laughter].

Lois: Again, it wasn't exactly, it wasn't what we had anticipated, as a woman, I still felt inadequate 'cause I couldn't deliver naturally, I delivered by cesarean, then the third pregnancy were twins, and I was really blessed to have a nurse midwife, and then her practice would allow me to try to have a vaginal birth and so she said, just stay at home, go into labor, stay at home, don't come to the hospital. I called her when I went into labor and she said, the one doctor in the practice that will probably let you have a natural childbirth is going home in two hours so come now. [laughter] So, I went, and thankfully, he did, and those of you who are in nursing, the second twin was breech, and before I could stop and, he actually went in there and pulled the baby out, um, which was rather, I mean, it was a manipulation, my father, who is now in his 90s, trained as a doctor as a general practitioner, told me afterwards, "Oh that's no problem, that's how you deliver a breach baby." And so anyway, we had that, and was able to nurse, both of them, however, my second son at that point was not quite weaned, so yes I did

nurse three at the same time. I did. It was interesting [laughter]. The older son had to take-

EPP Instructor: It's ok, I don't need to know! [Laughter].

Lois: I mean this is really interesting for women, especially, one of my, one of the twins was a very efficient nurser, and the other was a very lazy nurser, and so, when I would nurse them simultaneously, the one that was lazy was kind of going to sleep, then when the milk would come in, he would wake up and there would be milk all over [laughter] and the other one was just going to town, anyway, it was very special [laughter] anyway, after having four, totally I mean, definitely not typical births and nursing or anything else like that, um, I was surprised to be pregnant with the fifth son, I was so sure it was going to be a little girl, I almost passed out when they did the ultrasound and said you wanna know what it is, we know for sure. And I said sure, they said little boy and I almost fainted, I thought oh my gosh, how can I have five boys, but anyway, he was just precious-

EPP Instructor: You got a basketball team there! [Laughter].

Lois: And so with that son, also used a nurse midwife, nurse midwife, and so I stayed at home and I took a warm bath, like you're supposed to, and that was probably the most aware I've ever been of my body in my whole entire life, was feeling this amazing, uh, other person, moving inside of my body, but knowing that my body had created that entity that was within, and just feeling this gentle churning within and knowing that that I would never experience that again, but it

was ok and there was a bonding, a unity, that I experienced with that child at that moment that transcended anything I'd ever experienced before or since. And that that that I was able to go into like a birthing center, I remember, those of you that have had babies will understand this, I was walking around, 'cause before, with the other four, they would not let me walk around, which is probably why I failed at the second one, so I'm walking around, and I guess all the sudden I go into transition and this unbelievably sharp pain that was absolutely so gripping that you cannot stand it, I felt that and remember thinking to myself, remind yourself not to do this again [laughter]. (audio transcribed from Class session 6)

Three participants mentioned Lois' story in their post-class reflections. Brian⁴ wrote, "I was made a little uncomfortable [by Lois' story] but as it went on I thought about it in terms of my wife—that she would experience these things in the future and so I found it informative for future empathy-building." He continued with a general observation: "I also thought about how in some classes, that could be way out of bounds to talk about. That is, this class has an openness to it that most lack. Like Howard said today, 'we're all friends here.'" Blake said that he "really appreciated Lois' account of what it was like to be pregnant," noting that,

As a man, I will never get to experience pregnancy or childbirth from a first-hand perspective. I will never know the joys and pains of producing a life from within

⁴ I remind the reader here that when referring to myself as a study participant, I use the third person, Brian.

my own body. Lois' account was moving and I had to confront the fact that I will never share in a similar experience.

Blake's response shows one of the many times participants were "Completely Caught Up" in each other's stories and captures the language of "Coming to Appreciate Variations," indicating he was learning through the unique perspective offered by Lois. Not all post-class reflections or interview data were so clear. Donna did not feel a sense of completeness regarding the stories, but appreciated the "Investment" of time given to Lois:

As the class was trying to share and explain the two experiences of pregnancy or childbirth I found myself desiring to probe deeper into the reason why ones [*sic*] were making the connections and sharing as they did... so many unknowns and potential assumptions and utterances and body language engagements in that conversation[,] it was so interesting and I am thankful we gave time for people to share but wish we could have heard more.

Lois' story was one of the more personal stories told in class—no other stories included breast milk going "all over." This is a story that some might assume would only be told among friends or family, or only with a female audience. Yet the two males who commented both appreciated the story in their own ways, and the female who commented wanted to hear more. Interestingly, the only person in the class who could be seen as uncomfortable with the story was the professor, who joked throughout the story. Yet he never cut off her story completely or asked her to stop, so it is possible he was making jokes out of habit rather than discomfort—the EPP

instructor often used humor. Brian justified her story with a line from the instructor: “We’re all friends here,” a line that fits within the ground theme of “All Together in This Space.”

The general atmosphere of openness and safety participants reported to share such stories and the feeling that the participants were friends was either apparent or beginning already during the first class session (Sohn et al., 2016), when Meg shared the following story in her introduction:

Meg: I’m, my name is Meg and I came down to [southeastern state] as a result of one of the topics that was brought up earlier. Um, I’m working on, I’m a doctoral student in the department of nursing and my area of concentration is, the program name has changed, it was homeland security nursing and now it’s actually global disaster nursing. And um, the reason why I came down to [state] was because on September 11th, I lost my brother [brief pause, EPP Instructor: whoa, others murmur] in the World Trade Center. And so it brought its own sort of searching for meaning and um, I’m here I guess because the program that was offered at the college of nursing allowed me in some way to potentially harness you know my search to an engine, that would allow me to help as many people as I could and um, my first experience with existentialism was the Haiti earthquake last year, where, my advisor basically gave us the assignment, the syllabus was thrown out because it happened in January, and she said at this point, we’re going to be following social messages that are coming out from people, you know, victims in Haiti, and after amassing thousands of uh, you know, messages from Twitter,

from Facebook, and from listserves of people who were sending emails to family and relaying to that, we came up with themes, that were existentialist in nature, like death, isolation and freedom, and finding meaning in what's happened and um. When I heard, well, I heard about this class because my advisor sent out an email saying how wonderful [pause, laughs] the coursework was, and how relevant it would be potentially for anyone who would want to be doing qualitative research with disaster victims. There's a lot of quantitative research that gets done from risk management groups and agencies that provide resources, but the qualitative experience needs to be better documented I guess, and so I hope to gain a lot of insight. (audio transcribed from Class session 1)

Three students mentioned Meg's story on the post-class reflections, twice during focus groups, and George mentioned it in his individual interview. For Brian and Kari Ann, the post-class reflections simply stated that having a classmate who lost a brother in the 9/11 attacks stood out. For Barbara, she also noted that Meg was "moving on with her life." In the focus groups, which occurred during the 13th class session, Kari Ann noted the value of the perspective of Meg when discussing the national tragedy of the 9/11 attacks:

One thing that I keep...thinking about is...being able to deal with September 11th in this class...It was an interesting outlet to have for it...To come up on the ten year anniversary...and be able to talk about it and to...have someone who lost her brother that day in the class to get that...perspective, it...provided a unique forum for discussing that in a meaningful way.

For Blake, the story “poignantly showed me how different my world is from...not only Meg but everyone else in the class,” which helped him understand that “everyone does bring a different ground to bear at [*sic*] everything that they view,” and he used that insight to reflect on his own perspectives and assumptions, a process many students experienced as “Seeing Variations.” For George, when Meg shared that information, he felt more connected to her because of her willingness “to kind of be very personal...in a class like that very early in the semester and share that loss.” For George the story’s personal nature began to establish the ground of “All Together in This Space” during the first class session.

As Meg said in her introduction, the topics of birth and death are key elements of existentialism, and EPP was a course in existential phenomenological psychology. There are few topics as intense as these, and the story of death from Meg was shared in the first session of the course. Talking about such things as birth and death in class was experienced by students as indicative of an atmosphere of trust or solidarity and a sign of “Investment” in the course, one of the themes I discuss in detail below.

Reflections on course materials.

Another common occurrence in the data was for participants to mention other students in the context of reflections and discussions on course materials. The instructor often planned activities in which students interacted with such items as readings, songs, poems, paintings, or optical illusions. In the following incident, students were discussing a poem by Mark Strand. In this discussion, mentioned generally by five participants on post-class reflections, 14 of 19 of the students in attendance participated. There was a level of energy yet also a tone of reflection,

indicated by pauses and civil disagreement. After telling the class that a student gave him the poem, the instructor (EPP Instructor) asked if someone would read it.

Ingrid: I will.

EPP Instructor: Ok.

Ingrid: [Reading the poem] In the field, I am the absence of the field. This is always the case. Wherever I am, I am what is missing. When I walk, I part the air and always the air moves in to fill the spaces where my body's been. We all have reasons for moving, I move to keep things whole.

EPP Instructor: This is a poem that was given to me by a student, who said, this is exactly what Merleau-Ponty is talking about. And by implication, what she said to me, and what you're talking about if you spoke as well as Merleau-Ponty and the poet. Everybody always says stuff like that to me. But in any event, but in any event, what do you think about this poem, in light of what you've read fr- about the body and other stuff like that? Any part of it st- Hey, any part of this stand out to you? [Laughter] I can use my own question! [George laughs] Alright. [pause] Yes.

Whitney: I think the last stanza, like the last four lines. We all have reasons for moving, I move to keep things whole. And I think that sort of like, we keep moving and trying, struggling to keep that integration of mind and body, to keep it together.

EPP Instructor: And one of the ways you keep it together is by doing things.

Whitney: Right.

EPP Instructor: And?

Whitney: Staying conscious.

EPP Instructor: Ok, anything else, stand out, stand out in a different way?

Brian: I like the image of the second thing, the air filling in, in front of me
[inaudible]

EPP Instructor: I'm sorry I can't hear you.

Brian: I like the image of uh, air filling in the spaces where my body's been. Like my head was just here, but now it's there.

EPP Instructor: I moved, there's a space where I was, the air has moved in. Yes, Alexander.

Alexander: Yeah, I also keyed on that second stanza, it's almost like a consciousness that doesn't want to countenance emptiness, it always has to posit something being there. Even when there's nothing there.

EPP Instructor: Ok, so there's a certain feeling of emptiness and the attempt to deal with that, that emptiness, by moving, or by filling in the space. Yes.

Kari Ann: The first stanza was what-

EPP Instructor: Good! Now we got all three stanzas! [Graduate student participant-observer laughter]

Kari Ann: I was uh, thinking about, I don't know if that was the first day of class, you [EPP Instructor] were talking about how you know, you can see every face in

the class but your own. And uh, and that wherever I am, I'm what is missing.

Because I'm that, I'm that point where everything is coming from. So I can see everything but what I'm seeing with, I guess, is sort of an interesting way of putting it.

EPP Instructor: Yeah, [Professor Participant-Observer] er

Barbara: I feel the opposite.

Professor Participant-Observer: I'm curious if anybody besides me is troubled by the first few lines.

EPP Instructor: In the first 3 lines?

Professor Participant-Observer: Mm-hm.

EPP Instructor: What are you troubled by?

Professor Participant-Observer: Well if I look at it just from a visual sense, ok, I can't see my face. But I'm very aware of myself when I'm in a group. Maybe I'm too self-absorbed, but I am real aware, I'm aware of myself in this class, and when I participate and when I don't, how I'm reacting to other people, I'm not out of the field, I'm a central part of the field, and maybe it's more my affect I'm paying attention to, especially when I'm thinking about facilitating, I'm really aware of what it is I'm doing in relation to other people.

Phil: Um-

Professor Participant-Observer: And that feels like it's very much a part of the field, I try to want to know more about what the other person is presenting in the

field. By their acts but also by their thoughts and by their whole self, so I- I don't-
I don't agree with Merleau-Ponty? [laughter]

EPP Instructor: It's alright, he's dead.

Phil: I was thinking about that first line, the first line stanza as well. It seemed to me that she was saying that she's, somehow you have this field, this field is all around and she's an intrusion on it or a disruption of it somehow.

EPP Instructor: She's an emptiness on it, if you want to use that metaphor. It's not a happy poem, I mean, in one sense, it's about emptiness, and stuff like that. But, er, I think there's a way in which it's been interpreted by other folks as being a simple description without the negativity of absence or or stuff. Someone else wanted to- you wanted to say something, excuse me.

Barbara: I took it as describing figure and ground, and I'm the figure, and the ground is complete when I'm not there, but when I'm there, I'm imposing myself onto the ground.

EPP Instructor: Again, you have a negative evaluation of this sort of stuff, is that correct?

Barbara: I didn't take it as a negative, but-

EPP Instructor: Just descriptive.

Barbara: Just um, a separation of figure and ground, as the poet tried to make that clear.

EPP Instructor: Ok. You wanted to say something?

Lois: Well, in a similar way, I guess the way I was feeling is, I like that first stanza, too, it just sort of caught me. In a field, I am the absence of field. And it it felt to me that um, that, that when I am there, there is a part that is absent. I've taken up a space that is no longer occupied by that field, and it really gave me a sense of totality, that it it really shows to me that when when um, when different parts are not there then parts of the whole are missing. I don't know if that makes sense or not. I found it very intriguing in a sense of being a connectedness with all the things, and that's the reason for living.

EPP Instructor: Yes.

Meg: I had a sense of importance, like the person's existence, presence, is extremely important because things are defined by how the person moves through you know space, and the last line of the first stanza reminds me, my youngest son is on the autism spectrum, and his perception of self, is, if he is not in a particular place, then it's missing him. [EPP Instructor laughs] You know when he walks into a room, you know, I'm here. [EPP Instructor laughs] Everything must center around me, so it makes sense that wherever he isn't, it's missing him. Um, and that's what struck me in that, it's the importance of the person's impact in walking through space, that they consider themselves extremely important.

EPP Instructor: And he makes uh he leaves a space and uh-

Meg: And when he leaves it he has left an impression [laughter].

EPP Instructor: And.

George: That's what I heard in those, the last part of that first stanza, some c- importance, or even over importance, maybe conceitedness. Wherever *I* am, *I* am what is missing. I emphasized different words there when I just read it, but-

EPP Instructor: You emphasized the I, obviously.

George: Yeah, wherever I am, I am what is missing. I'm interested in hearing what others in here think about that sentence, or that last part.

Sonia: But when-

George: Did some feel like Meg and I heard, or did y'all hear something else?

Whitney: Or could it be the opposite though, because, wherever I am, I I am what is missing, so it's again, going back to, here's the field, and I'm standing in the field, so I'm taking up that part of the field, that's missing, so I am the part that-of the field, that is missing. So then, at the bottom, when, we all have reasons for moving, I move to keep things whole because the minute I move out of the field, the field is whole again.

EPP Instructor: Or the opening that I was, is closed.

[three talking at once: EPP Instructor, Lisa, George]

Lisa: So I am missing in the field, and I moved, and now it's whole again.

George: The old field is whole, or the new field is whole?

Brian: The old field is whole.

Lisa: The field, well, I don't know if it's old or new, but it's whole because I'm not in it, I'm not taking up space any more.

George: I heard it the other way. [laughter]

Lisa: It's like the vase, and the faces.

George: I agree with that.

Lisa: Ooo, it is like it's that. [laughter]

Sonia: I think it goes back to the whole thing of us being embedded in our space, uh, it's not, I don't necessarily see it as a negative poem, because, this, this is what I create, this is, this space, this perception is what I create, so it has to have me in order to be created. So in the field I am the absence of field because I am I am the originator, I create this, this is all about what I perceive and what I, what is me, extended into space, so it has to have me in order to exist. [pause] That's what I thought.

EPP Instructor: James?

James: I think I'm, I'm more in line with- I just kind of read it as very positive 'cause, m- I guess my bias is you know, being in just like, healthy lifestyle, and exercise and those kinds of things are important and I want to constantly, kind of encourage a lot of people you know, students or family, friends, all those things, how to do that and I really see that as part of someone being whole, if that is part of your lifestyle. So I saw it as like, reasons for moving, and I instantly go there. So that's where I was like, oh, that makes, a lot of sense, sounds like-

EPP Instructor: The moving part.

James: Yeah, and just like the absence of it as like, you need something, so make something whole, and just including the self in that. And I think it's also interesting 'cause when we were talking about the body, there's two different experiences, but then also, I mean just for me how I interpreted it, keeping things whole in movement, made me go in to something positive.

EPP Instructor: What are the things he's keeping whole? [pause] I'm asking that question 'cause I don't know [laughs].

Ingrid: I thought he was keeping himself whole. [pause]

[Sonia and Blake start]

Sonia: He's keeping the world whole.

Blake: I think maybe he's being, when he moves, out of the field, restoring it, re-returning it to the wholeness that it was. I think paradoxically by moving out of the field he's moving somewhere else, and breaking that up, so uh, by moving we are both restoring and breaking apart, um, our locations and situations.

Ingrid: I thought it was, I saw it completely differently, like the world is, we we come into being through relationship with the world, so the field is part of my world, and it defines me and the spaces I'm in then define me. So I change, I move and I grow, by moving into those different spaces, and that keeps me defined and whole. So I'm not defining it, the world's kind of defining me.

EPP Instructor: The thing I think is important to me is this is a first-person poem, and I think that, so if we say it's narcissistic and stuff like that, that, the person

may be forgiven, it's a he by the way, um, Mark Strand, and uh, I think that's kind of what's important here, it is from the first person point of view and that's what I think, the woman who gave me the poem, was thinking about it, and I was thinking about it. This is from my point of view. The second thing is that this is the first time I've ever noticed it, is the play on words, in the last word, in the last word. Whole. [pause, mm-hm] That's very nice. The hole h-o-l-e, keeps the rest of the thing, whole, and what makes that is the movement, the being alive, is kind of what that last paragraph is, we all have reasons for moving, I move to keep things whole. The other thing that's interesting to me is that there are so- and Blake said it before, the rest of the body disappears when he's excited, when he's in a classroom or intellectual kind of context. (audio transcribed from Class session 7)

At this point, the instructor began a mini-lecture to transition the class into the next activity. In the post-class reflections, Lisa, Barbara, and Kelly all noted that hearing different perspectives on the poem was similar in nature to the way the Rubin figure can change from vase to faces and back again. As Kelly said, "I was aware of the different interpretations of the poem and how I agreed with all. As well as aware that you can't agree with them all at the same time (like the vase picture)." Whitney, as many participants often did in the post-class reflections, reflected on the poem personally. She quoted the last line of the poem and noted that, "I feel at my point in my life I am stagnant and need to move to stay alive." Brian's reflection was more superficial, but shows the power other perspectives had on him: "Poem went from happy-ish (or

at least pleasant) to depressing thanks to different perspectives.” It is from these kinds of reflections and others that one of the themes of the SEOS emerges: Barbara noted that through the discussion of the poem she was “Seeing Variations.”

Practiced Research.

Another common context for the SEOS was within activities designed to practice methodological techniques like interviewing and analysis of interview transcripts. During the seventh class session, two practice interviews took place. Twelve of the 18 participants present noted on post-class reflections that interviews or interviewing stood out to them. Lisa commented extensively in her individual interview about the first interview, during which she took a turn interviewing Alexander. In the second interview, Jackie volunteered to be interviewed about a time she was aware of her body. James was asked by the instructor to begin the interview.

James: Yeah, I can give it a shot. First question, um, Jackie, can you tell me about a time when you were aware of your body?

Jackie: Yes, um, three days ago.

James: Can you expand upon that? [laughter]

Jackie: Um, I got, I got married three days ago, and [oohs from class] and I was, gonna say this earlier in discussion but, it was the first time, in my life, where I had to make, put a great effort forward, in a controlling, and putting my thoughts aside and thinking about my body so that I could be aware of my positioning, be in tune with my body while I was gonna be so nervous I might pass out, so I could

intervene before that might happen, um, and I really wanted to remember the, I didn't want to be so caught up in the moment that I took out the concept of time, and my surroundings, so that I could form and think about the memories later.

James: First off, congrats. [laughter]

EPP Instructor: That, by the way, was excellent. As an interviewer sort of strategy. He indicates he's sort of tracking the person, he's connected to the person, he expresses it, and it's quick [Graduate student participant-observer laugh]. He didn't say, "Oh am I glad to learn about this aspect of your life which is going so well, and I know," no, he says, "Congratulations." He said all of that, brilliantly. 'Cause everybody always says, you always ask things like, tell me another specific situation or tell me more about that. This is a very bonding connecting sort of thing, I think it's rather important. So, [to Jackie], congratulations. [laughter]

Jackie: I appreciated that comment.

James: Can I start again? Time in? [laughter]

Graduate student participant-observer: Time in. [more laughter]

James: You mentioned just, being very aware of your positioning, your body and being in tune with your body. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Jackie: Um, well it was very important for me to exercise that control over my body so that, maybe I didn't make a mistake, or like I said, I wasn't gonna pass out or misspeak when I was repeating my vows, 'cause I was so caught up with

uh, you know I just felt like my mind was completely taken over and I had to, just, exercise a lot of control over it, so that I could, control my body and perform in the way that I wanted it to go.

James: I hear, being in tune is, comes with this idea of control, can, I guess I'm still searching for a little bit more of that or can you talk a little bit more about that control, especially, of in tune with your body.

Jackie: Well, I guess uh, it's difficult to explain in a way, I mean it makes sense to me whenever I'm telling you this, but I'll try and word it differently. Um, my emotions and my thoughts in my mind were very heightened, and I felt that I needed to, not necessarily suppress them, but keep them contained so that I could perform well and they wouldn't over ride you know, my my body, so that, and I keep going back to this, but like, I felt like, if I would have just let my mind run loose, and be so totally caught up in what I was thinking and feeling, that I might pass out, so it was important to me to you know, make myself think about my body, so that I could, so that I could walk forward, so that I wasn't gonna buckle my knees, so that I wasn't going to just uh completely mispronounce every word in my vows, it was important to me to have like, that performance, to, and to also be able to recall later, and think about how you know, my performance during the time.

James: So you're trying to be aware of your body and, and talk about just for, those moments, can you tell me about that experience and how you did?

Jackie: I feel like I was successful. I didn't pass out [laughter] um. I feel like I was successful. And I sort of related to, whenever you give important presentations in or performance of the same nature, you sort of lose the concept of time, and you lose the ability to maybe hear others, and you're not as aware of your surroundings, and it was important for me to not let that happen, in this situation, so that I could reflect on it later, accurately and remember my surroundings, and I recall that as being very challenging, but I achieved it.

EPP Instructor: Anyone else want to say anything, we'll take one more question, go ahead. James: I guess my question would be, can you tell me about that? Those surroundings, you said you were trying to look back and reflect on it, what was that like for you?

Jackie: Well, I mean do you want

James: Just tell me about, 'cause you said, you want to be in the moment, and, be aware of time and your surroundings, so you can really be in that moment, so I'm interested to hear about what that moment was like for you, what you recall about your surroundings [Jackie interrupts]

Jackie: Right. It was overwhelming and, but in a in a good way. Um, and I wanted to capture every piece that I could, such as, the expressions on my mom's face, and my dad's and the reactions of my families and my grooms and the officiant. You know, I just really wanted to paint a picture for myself that I could reflect on later and continue to enjoy, even after the moment had passed.

EPP Instructor: Does anyone else wanna pick up the questioning of the interview?

Phil: Yeah, um, and just a, make sure I'm on right track with what you're describing so far, um, your bodily awareness during the wedding, um, was kind of one of wanting to maintain an attunement between the mind and the body so that's what I'm hearing is, a disconnect between the two that could have happened because of the overwhelming nature, can you explain that?

Jackie: I almost felt as if, I almost feel as if there was a need to make a disconnect between the two, so that one didn't override the other and take total control and I lose um, I just feel like I had to contain my thoughts and con- maintain my composure, in order to function properly, physically.

Phil: So it was so, it was something you see as an ongoing effort to maintain-

Jackie: Correct, during the ceremony, specifically. During the vows and the walking down the aisle part, yes, it was an ongoing effort for me to have to sort of, remind myself, ok, don't buckle your knees, or remind myself, you know, look at everybody's face because this moment won't ever come again. And I wanted to soak up everything, but I had to tell myself, you know, you have to look to your left, to where your mother in law is sitting or you have to look up to your groom and you have to listen to the officiant.

EPP Instructor: Let's stop now, the word I heard most here, and I want you guys to take a break...first of all...notice the way that these two discussions, comments, are not about trivial things. That's one thing you're going to learn when you do

this kind of interviewing, people will talk about...you're gonna get very deep important stuff...I want to thank Alexander and Jackie for being so brave, to be quite truthful, it's a tough topic...This is serious stuff...the word that I heard that came up...was performance...almost a play...you would rather not have been in that situation so you could look back on it...you were projecting forward...almost a photographic record...you were taking everything in-

Jackie: Which is interesting because that's not, we changed our plans at the last minute, we originally were gonna just have us two and the officiant, and not everybody, not a crowd.

EPP Instructor: But you did have a good size crowd-

Jackie: Yeah.

EPP Instructor: Again, thanks to both of you, and let's take a break...

James and Jackie both wrote about this incident in their post-class reflections. For Jackie, she continued to communicate what she felt she did not articulate in her interview, noting, along with Kelly, that to describe an experience of the body is difficult. Phil and George noted that the content of the interviews was powerful, serious stuff, and Sonia felt an intimacy due to the type of question and how "real" the answers were. These reactions show that participants saw each other demonstrate "Investment" in the course. Other reactions show participants "Completely Caught Up." They were often compelled by the stories and comments of their peers in EPP, and at times so much so that the course "Spilled Out" into other areas of their lives. Jackie "want[ed] to extend the conversation," and did with her post-class reflection. For James, "Spilling Out"

involved getting caught up in memories of his own wedding. In his post-class reflection, he wrote:

I loved the interview of the woman who spoke about recently being married. It brought me back to my own experience of being married and thinking specifically about how I felt. Since, I was worried about fainting, but I was not concerned with others. When I saw my wife walking down the aisle I was overcome with emotion and joy. I never cared about anything but her. It was beautiful.

These incidents help paint a picture of the kinds of student experiences that happened in the course and led to the experience as captured by the thematic structure. In the next section I describe the elements of the thematic structure that emerged through my phenomenological analysis of the SEOS in more detail.

General Findings: Themes and Support

In this section I describe the elements of the thematic structure. I begin with the ground and then present the themes and subthemes with support from participant data (see Figure 1).

Ground: “All Together in This Space.”

The ground is the base, the foundation upon which other aspects of the experience appear as figural. It provides a starting point for readers in seeing the participants’ lived experience of each other in the course. In the student experience of other students, the ground was “All Together in This Space.” For participants there was a general feeling of being together in a collegial atmosphere. Donna made this clear explicitly:

I have greatly enjoyed the experience of this class & I almost feel emotional about our time together coming to an end. As we reflected on what we have learned, I feel fulfilled & satisfied. I hope to have similar experiences in future classes but I know that this experience can never be re-created; we will never all be together in this space. My respect for this class, my classmates & this experience has truly changed & shaped my experience in my program at [southeastern university].

Thank you! (post-class reflection, Class 15)

Other participants wrote statements such as, “we’re all friends here” (Brian, see above for full context) or used “we” extensively in their reflections or interviews.

At times the ground was revealed because it was disrupted. A collection of participants noticed when other students were absent. The ground was disturbed and it became figural—its implicit nature was made explicit. Along with Brian, Blake and George expressed similar sentiments to Thomas, who said, “Missing people from the class today” (Thomas, post-class reflection, Class 8). Four of the 21 participants were not in attendance that class session.

For other participants there were times when the ground was explicit. They talked of feelings of solidarity, validation, safety, or comfort with and through their classmates. For some participants, the ground began to form after the first class session. In their post-class reflections, Sonia, Barbara, and Lois commented on what brought this particular group of people together—an interest in phenomenology and, as Lois put it, the desire to “expose the heart of matters” (post-class reflection, Class 1). Others developed a sense of safety and togetherness after more time had passed. Remarking on a story she told in the twelfth class session, Kari Ann said,

I was a little self conscious about whether or not what I was saying would help get the discussion where EPP Instructor wanted it to go, but I was having fun. There's nothing like the feeling of hearing a room full of people erupt in laughter right at the moment they are supposed to. It was also nice seeing nodding heads showing an understanding of a similar experience with teaching.

She captures in this statement the affirmation students often provided for each other, a key aspect of the ground for the other themes. Participants were together, present in a classroom, and as part of this presentness, participants noticed the investments their classmates made in the course. I discuss the perceived "Investment" below.

"Investment."

The theme "Investment" is based on the ground of "All Together in This Space" and includes the sub-themes of "Responsibility," "Getting Hands Dirty," and "Genuineness." In this section I support the emergence of this theme with participant data.

Participants generally perceived others in the course as invested and noted their own "Responsibility" to others or the particular contributions others shared throughout the course. Rather than seeing their classmates as going through the motions, participants considered the students around them to be "Genuine." The stories of birth, death, and the wedding, and the perspectives on the poem I shared above, were taken by participants as signs of "Investment" in the course. Some remarked that the non-competitive atmosphere of the course, created in part by the assurance from the instructor that everyone would receive an A, allowed them to act as

learners pursuing understanding together as opposed to *students* “fighting for a grade or trying to prove that [they] know more than [other students] do” (Sonia, individual interview).

Other students described a similar experience. Lois said that she felt like a learner rather than a student (individual interview). For her there was a kind of freedom and safety afforded by the absence of grades that allowed people to share openly. Kari Ann and Barbara made comments like Sonia’s about grades. Kari Ann described “feeling like a human being” in a non-competitive environment where no one “was trying to be the cleverest” rather “we’re all working together to try and understand these things and everybody’s story matters and we want to hear it” (individual interview). Barbara attributed the atmosphere of the course in part to the “the question of grades [being] resolved pretty early.” For her, investment was facilitated because “it feels a lot more free- a free place to exchange ideas, and it’s a genuine exchange of ideas rather than...vying to establish oneself as the...top dog in the classroom...All that is...left at the door” (focus group 1). Alexander found it “refreshing” that the course got away from the “orthodoxy” of the institutional education process, noting that it went “a long way to facilitate understanding and make it so that people are more engaged” (focus group 2). Barbara and Alexander showed how an open atmosphere of togetherness is related to the ability of students to invest genuinely in the course.

George commented at length during the second focus group on his appreciation for the “Investment” other students made during the course:

George: I’ve got some emails or, we all have, if you’ve checked your email- from Brian or somebody like Barbara when she did- she’s in the other [focus] group

and we had a...real kind of therapy session. You (indicating) played the client [sic], I was sharing and Barbara took all these *detailed* notes...and then she sent me a transcript of the interview...of what we said about me, and then I got to kind of reflect on that, um...with people in my life just to kind of help them better understand who I am. And that was just *powerful*, I mean-

Lois: Wow.

Brian: That's huge.

George: I mean, we don't have all the time- we only had fourteen classes to- for all of us to connect with each other on that kind of level, but- so I just wanted to thank all of you. Everybody contributed, I think, to each other either directly or indirectly.

“Investment” could be seen in academic and personal contributions—that students perceived each other as caring can also be seen in the above quote and this reflection from Blake, “I appreciated it when Meg asked me if I enjoyed the reading. We spoke briefly about it last week and the continuity of interest makes it seem like she cares” (post-class reflection, Class 12). After the next class session, Blake reflected that he would “miss the intimacy of the class...If we aren't intimately engaging with the material, it seems like we run the risk of not learning from it. I wish all courses engaged with me the way this one has” (post-class reflection, Class 13). Blake noted engagement, which at times was used by participants to show commitment or investment, and at other times showed ways in which they were “Completely Caught Up” in each other or course content (for full discussion of that theme, see below).

In some cases the “Investment” noted by participants was in relation to the students’ desire to explore topics deeply. In the second focus group, Lisa remarked explicitly on how being given or taking time allowed for deeper “Investment:”

We don’t just skim over material. We take time. We take enough time to go into it deeper...[In other classes] I almost feel like people are looking at their watch...including our professors, like, “Is she done yet?” You know. And I didn’t feel that way. I didn’t feel like anybody was rushing me because we just got to explore deep learning.

After the third class session, Whitney noted the “phenomenal” engagement of other students in regard to a discussion about the value of description: “Students really engaged and tried to actively engage in different tasks like challenging perception. This ultimately challenges the beliefs of truths. The engagement of students was truly phenomenal” (post-class reflection). In Whitney’s case, engagement is related to taking on difficult tasks related to course content. For other students, engagement was an investment spurred by a sense of “Responsibility,” the first subtheme.

“Responsibility.” Within small groups and sometimes with the whole class, students felt responsible to each other. During a group activity that carried over from the fourth to the fifth class session, Donna “fel[t] like [she] let [her] group down by not bringing...notes” (post-class reflection, Class 5) from the previous class session, indicating her sense of responsibility to her peers. Jackie showed what many expressed when taking on certain roles in class activities, in her case as an interviewer:

During the interview activity my role was to be the interviewer. Similar to the following class discussion, I found myself wanting to engage in regular conversation but could not [because] I didn't want to ask leading questions. It was a bit difficult to hold back where I wanted the verbiage to go. I felt a sense of responsibility as the interviewer to keep the engagement going until completion and while the participant was speaking I was constantly trying to think of my next question.

There were times when participants remarked on other students *not* fulfilling the responsibilities they expected of their classmates, but they were rare. When it came to a discussion of assigned readings by William James, both Phil and George suspected that others had not done the reading or had not given it sufficient effort. These reflections were from the 14th class session (the second-to-last session of the semester)—at no other time were similar comments made. By the fourteenth class, an expectation had been established regarding student involvement, and it stood out to Phil and George when that expectation was not met. Just as most comments related to responsibility leaned in the positive direction, so did the comments indicating genuineness.

“Genuineness.” For the most part, participants commented on the genuine nature of their classmates. James spoke at length about his peers after Class 13:

I felt as though there were many genuine people in this class. For the most part, people were very engaged with one another and with the material, which I found to be very enjoyable. Many times while in a classroom it seems like people “need

to talk” rather than say something meaningful...People meant what they said and offered genuine comments and questions (post-class reflection).

In an institutional setting it is conceivable that students would say what is considered conventional or desired by the professor or their classmates. But participants were taken by surprise by the ways their classmates invested in the course and each other. Barbara noted “the degree of emotion that students seemed to experience related to the decisions they talked about making in life. Choosing between two good things vs. choosing to end a relationship” (post-class reflection, Class 14). George said, “we’re so used to going in and taking notes and then leaving.” The kind of genuine investment he experienced of others was novel; he noted, “I haven’t had a graduate experience like that” (individual interview).

As noted in the introduction to this theme, acting as learners pursuing understanding rather than students pursuing grades was noted by various participants as part of what created a sense of authenticity among classmates.

A final quote related specifically to “Genuineness” helps transition to the final subtheme of “Investment,” “Getting Hands Dirty.” During one of the practice interviews, Lisa moved from her seat to be closer to the interviewee, Alexander. In her individual interview she revealed that she regretted doing so because she made Alexander uncomfortable, but Kari Ann commented on this incident as follows:

I was, I don’t know, maybe impressed by the way Lisa embodied “interviewing” the way she did. Where most of us were either mildly play acting or just asking questions without much thought for form or appropriateness for qualitative

interviewing, she just jumped into the role fully and owned it (post-class reflection, Class 7).

Here Kari Ann compared the ways most of the class took on the role of interviewer and the way Lisa “owned it.” She was impressed by the genuine way Lisa took on the role and finds it superior to what others did when it was their turn. Yet “play acting,” messing around, exploring, and getting hands dirty was often seen as a form of investment and appreciated by participants.

“*Getting Hands Dirty.*” Many students described the group’s effort in pursuing the course activities as a form of exploration or “Getting Hands Dirty.” Lisa stated the theme eloquently:

And this beautiful core group of people who keep coming back seem to want to you know, go along with that, go with that flow...and think deeper and and put themselves out there and be available to put out ideas and flounder...and mess around with it and get messy, and that’s really awesome and nobody’s afraid of doing that...You can put an idea out there and get muddy and it’s, it’s ok. It’s good. It’s all good. (individual interview)

Lisa felt “everybody had a chance to do that” with many of the course activities. For her, the activities were like toys and provided joyful learning opportunities with classmates. She shared specifically about the The Ames Window illusion, or rotating trapezoid experiment⁵.

I mean it was great ‘cause every time [the trapezoid] would go around I was like, “No, way!” [said while laughing]...I was sitting next to my friend and she would go, “Wait a minute I think I’ve got it figured,” but she’d go, “No! No! It’s still not it!” You know there was part of us that was just, it was playful. It was really cool and it really felt that way.

Other participants noticed the “messing around” in the form of exploring. Lois, after the fourth class, noted “The expansiveness of group exploration of a piece of writing” (post-class reflection).

After the seventh class session, Sonia wrote, “During the interviews, I felt an intimacy caused by the type of questions asked – the subject matter – real experience/perception [because] we aren’t always asked these questions” (post-class reflection). She shared this observation aloud during that class session:

[In phenomenology] you are asking people questions that nobody asks...you have to reflect on thoughts in a way you normally never do, so suddenly, he’s asking

⁵ This experiment is an optical illusion in which a two-dimensional trapezoid shape is painted to look like a window. The shape is placed on a motor so it can rotate in circles. Rather than appearing to rotate in circles, it appears to oscillate back and forth. The illusion is augmented by attaching a tubular object to one of the windowpane cut outs. The tubular object appears to go around and through the windowpane.

me things and I'm making connections going, "Wow, why hadn't I thought of that before?"...because I had never taken the time to think about it.

This idea that phenomenological questions elicited explorations, discoveries, and connections was echoed by Brian, Kelly, and Thomas. Brian noted a group awareness that class session "around the common sense of discovery" (post-class reflection, Class 10) the students shared. Sonia noted that certain explorations of the self do not usually happen, despite dealing with, in her case, insomnia, for years. "So I'm sitting there writing notes, going, 'Oh my God! I didn't know- I didn't realize I thought that about myself.' Why didn't I make that connection before? It makes so much sense." She said that people do not, on their own, make such connections, "But with people asking me the questions, it was suddenly like, 'Oh yeah! Okay.'" Through the other students she was able to explore and "get a deeper understanding" into her insomnia and the interview activity "led [her] into areas that [she] would *never* had gone before this [interview]" (focus group 1). In Sonia's quote the connection between "Investment" in the form of taking time, asking intimate questions, and "Getting Hands Dirty," relates to "Coming to Appreciate Variations." Sonia uses the perspective elicited in an interview to help explore her own issues.

For Lois, the questions, stories, togetherness, and "Genuineness" reflected "Investment," and for her it was like therapy. She remarked on why she "looked forward to the class every week."

Often the bravery and the courage of members as they shared, like you could say this is almost like therapy for me. That there was a trust among the members of the class...to share things that were beyond their level of comfort. They wouldn't

have done it in any other group and especially such a large group. (Lois,
individual interview)

Her reference to the sense of trust helps show how “Investment” was related to the ground of “All Together in This Space:” part of how that ground was established is because students did more than just show up and sit near each other.

Others also described the course as being therapeutic, some in relation to their experience of others. Phil, for example, described “the way we collectively held the tenth anniversary [of the 9/11 attacks]” as “healing” and “therapeutic.” The discussion, and particularly that one of the other students said the United States “had it coming” made him indignant, and yet he agreed. It was “healing to be able to...hold both sides of it within myself and to realize, yes, I do feel this way, and yet, I also feel this way about...what was...a very traumatic day for everybody who was old enough to remember it” (focus group 1). Participants experienced other students as “Invested,” and this contributed to another facet of the SEOS, “Completely Caught Up,” which I explain in the next section.

“Completely Caught Up.”

“Completely Caught Up” is, like the other themes, figural on the ground of “All Together in This Space.” Without the connection and togetherness of the participants, being “Completely Caught Up” would be a rare facet of SEOS. But it was common. “Completely Caught Up” has some overlap with “Investment” in that both themes involved what participants saw as “engagement.” For me, the engagement represented by “Completely Caught Up” is differentiated

with the subtheme, “Spilling Out,” which shows how engagement extended beyond the normal boundaries of a course and its setting. I discuss the theme and subtheme in turn.

Students were wrapped up in what they heard and saw during class sessions. They were engaged emotionally, as expressed by Kari Ann after a class session in which classmates shared flashbulb memories from September 11th, 2001:

I was so moved, nearly to tears, as people began sharing their experiences. I felt completely caught up in Lois’ story of watching it all unfold with her boys. I was on edge as if I didn’t know what was going to happen next, and reflecting on what it would have been like to go through that with my child. I say “completely caught up” but I was also aware of the woman who lost her brother on 9/11, wondering what she was making of all of our secondary experiences of her more personal tragedy. (post-class reflection, Class 11)

Ingrid had a similar experience that class session, if less specific: “Many of the experiences people shared today brought tears to my eyes. I’m not sure why my reaction was so emotional” (post-class reflection, Class 11). Students engaged emotionally and in other ways.

Some participants noticed when many other students were “Completely Caught Up” in an activity. “The big awareness today was the silence during our experiment with grouping items. I don’t think we have had so much silence ever before in the class. I looked up and around and everyone was diligently categorizing” (Brian, post-class reflection, Class 8). Here Brian noticed that others are diligently pursuing the class activity. Noting this and others may mean that Brian was not as caught up in the activity as others, but the silence is what drew him out of his

categorizing such that he noticed other students. What is expected by the eighth class for Brian was students being caught up in vocalizing, and here another way to be caught up is in silence. Barbara often made similar observations of the class as a whole, as in the following quote from class session 5:

As George and Brian read the interview like a play, the students reacted like a Greek chorus - making sure the audience understood what was being said, drawing attention to bits and pieces that stand out or are related to each other. Class members became more animated during the process and very interactive. People smiled at each other frequently and nodded. (Barbara, post-class reflection, Class 5).

Here Barbara describes the ways in which other students are “Completely Caught Up” in the reading of an interview transcript about a time the participant traveled. In this quote the ground of “All Together in This Space” can be seen in the non-verbal communication, and “Investment” can be seen in that students are helping each other understand, as noted by Barbara.

As Kari Ann said in her individual interview, there were times when “we all got caught up in telling our stories about something or...we really just connected sort of emotionally with some topic and so we were talking about it and...getting away from-...poor Merleau-Ponty’s been left behind.” Getting connected emotionally on a topic was facilitated by the “Investment” of time that students made. In each of the focus groups, which began with the prompt, “What are specific things that stand out to you in your experience of this course,” participants got caught up in conversations related to the content of the course (as opposed to specific things from their

experience), relating the phenomenological perspective to a desire to reducing the “silo” nature of the academic disciplines to embrace a more holistic view or embracing freedom in a variety of disciplines. These “tangents” went on for some time in each focus group.

Being “Completely Caught Up” often resulted in a “Spilling Out” of course content into non-EPP course domains. Just as in the focus groups participants had trouble staying on specific topics, there were frequent other times in the course in which participants could not contain their learning or involvement in the conventionally allotted time and space. I share examples below.

“Spilling Out.” Part of being “Completely Caught Up” for participants meant that the course and its content “spilled” over into other areas of their lives: the course would “continue” in other physical locations, with other people not in the course, and in personal and professional domains. As Alexander said, “My learning experience won’t stop when the class stops” (individual interview).

Lois described in her individual interview what it was like for her to be a learner in the course:

As we’re talking about what was it like for me as a learner in this environment, it was- it was not that it was just *in* that environment but it spilled out of the environment and...there were many- on many occasions that the conversation spilled out in the hallway and outside and in the ladies room and after class.

(individual interview)

The spilling over could be social and content-driven, as described above, or social without a clear link to content as described by Kari Ann:

I was really struck by how much more friendly chatter went on after our focus group. This class has always been friendly, of course, but talking in the focus group seemed to open us up to one another a bit more. I had been crocheting during the focus group, and everyone seemed interested to know what I was making that led to an extended conversation regarding crafting, store locations, family relationships, etc. that I hadn't expected. (post-class reflection, Class 13)

For other participants the “Spilling Out” was content-driven and individual, but attributed to what other students had said in a class discussion. After a class session examining perceptual exercises including the Necker cube, Jackie reflected, “Examining the objects and hearing others’ interpretations – found myself looking for alternate patterns on the elevator floor during the break” (post-class reflection, Class 2). Jackie is caught up in that she continues with perceptual exercises from the class session on the elevator.

There were many ways participants applied ideas, lessons, or content from the course, and these were part of the meaning of being “Completely Caught Up” and “Spilling Out.” The course was spilling out into their lives. Some of these applications to other areas were written in such a way that SEOS is clear—participants mention a discussion or something from what another participant said within their reflection. At other times participants were so caught up in their idea for application that they did not mention others. But the data delimitations in this study determine that participants at minimum had to imply a connection to other students. It could be argued that if a participant briefly mentions a discussion and then writes extensively about a personal experience that relates to it, the personal experience is likely to be a more meaningful

phenomenon than the discussion that spurred the thought. But for this phenomenological case study, I did not ignore the context in which participants placed their applicative thoughts.

After a class session that included discussions on the differences between time as a social institution and time as experienced by individuals, Blake reflected on the ideas from discussion to consider his personal situation.

Given the amount of social roles we must perform it seems rather difficult to be authentic all of the time. Our discussion of these roles spurred this on...I was aware of the fact that I go through phases of feeling authentic and feeling untrue to myself. I experience a good amount of dissonance when...I'm not acting in a specific way in [a] specific situation [and it] jeopardizes the opportunities I have to succeed in society. It is a difficult struggle to remain authentic and to remain successful. (post-class reflection, Class 12).

During the second focus group interview, Alexander recounted a story of working with a friend on questions that emerged for Alexander through the course,

Alexander: I wrote up a piece I called, "The Philosophy of Dance," and, um, she choreographed a dance routine for it.

Brian: Cool.

Unknown participants: Aw! Wow! Oh!

Alexander: And we performed it at [Community College] and at- um, in [City name] for some sort of art- artistic fundraiser they had there. But, something came out of it. So, it's affected me outside of the classroom.

In the following example, George, a counselor, gets caught up in a story from Lisa about a child moving and realizes the relevance to his future work:

The importance of context in phenomenological inquiry...I was much more aware of all of the contextual factors and variables that exist. Social context in particular is important in my interpretation of the world as it relates to client's/patient's thoughts, feelings, motivations, behavior, etc. I also realize that who "I" is is determined by the contextual field, and by my perception and history. The example of the mother cleaning and rearranging the room made me more aware of how ambiguity, change, and chaos can affect me and others (post-class reflection, Class 4).

Usually applications went in one direction: participants got caught up in an idea from class and applied it elsewhere. In this case, Lois, in regards to a discussion on the experience of the roles people take on in society, "Spilled Out" into her prior experiences in theater and brings it back to those around her.

Being a thespian at heart, the discussion of playing a role whether on the boards and off refocused my thinking of theater and the whole world of play and reality. How the reality of the play often became the reality of life during a production – and, at the end of the class. When confronted with reflecting on what stood out in class, the whole issue of what role each of us played made me think about what is indeed real. (post-class reflection, Class 12)

There were times during the course that participants were “Caught Up” in their own way, in other things. These statements show that the course and its students did not always hold the undivided attention of participants.

Caught Up in Something Else. There were reflections that showed times when students made clear they were NOT caught up in the content of a class session or distracted. The rarity of these data could be due to performance effects or the delimitations of the data, but their presence speaks at least somewhat to the fact that, at least at times, participants were not just writing what they thought researchers wanted to hear. For example, what stood out to Phil after one class session in which students worked together was, “How much I dislike working in groups” (post-class reflection, Class 5). Similarly, in the fourth class session, Ingrid described the group process as “clunky.”

There were times when other issues called students attention more than the course, despite the instructor’s stated intent to “make the course activities so compelling that students forget about ‘the rent’” (*personal communication*). One example comes from Lois:

What was not going on with class. For over a week my life has been complicated by primarily the health of close family members, my mother-in-law and my brother. Both are in separate hospitals. During class I received several phone calls that required my attention and in one case to make a decision for one of them. Sort of my own little crisis. I so appreciated the 9/11 discussion about how we act in the face of unexpected difficulty and the wisdom to “continue on” doing what

is important when we can do nothing else had immediate value and truth. (post-class reflection, Class 11)

In the following excerpt, George ponders his future:

During the discussion of the Pollio text and 9/11 in particular, I started to think more about death my own death [*sic*]. I started to daydream a bit and wonder if I am going the “right” way in my life. Some fatalistic thinking occurred as I started to doubt that I will live much longer or even get married & have children. The discussion made me reevaluate my priorities and how I want to spend my time.

Family came to mind during class and how I reach out to connect, and still others are estranged or cut off...I tend to stay busy when coping with loss. This week I will think more about my dad than in the past 3 years since his death.

The examples provided in this section paint a picture of the meaning of being “Completely Caught Up” in students’ SEOS. The stories and activities the students shared were compelling and emotionally engaging. When the SEOS “Spilled Out”, students took their experience of others with them outside the class environment and made applications to their personal and professional lives. While some examples of this kind of transformative learning, where students *realize* the content of the course in their lives, are provided above, the next theme, “Coming to Appreciate Variations,” provides a more detailed look at the learning progression that occurred for students in this course and their SEOS.

“Coming to Appreciate Variations.”

“Coming to Appreciate Variations” is a theme that shows a progression in student experience of other students as time went on and captures a mode of learning through the SEOS. Barbara supplied some of the language for “Coming to Appreciate Variations” during focus group 1. After describing her learning in the course as “growing” as a result of people “bringing their own background” or “experience,” she remarked on the class’ rare diversity:

Not only in terms of our different disciplines and academic backgrounds, but...we have a wide variety...of ages, all sorts of different- I don’t know, it seems as if we have a pretty diverse range of...personal philosophical standpoints and religious standpoints and so forth and I have really *come to appreciate* it because in all of the other classes I’m taking, everybody’s a clinical psychology student, so it’s like everybody kind of comes to the class with very similar perspectives on things.

(emphasis added)

The subthemes are divided in level of expressed depth on a spectrum with a bias toward self-reflection and change as the most advanced end. The subthemes are “Diversity,” “Seeing Variations,” and “Changes in Being.”

“Diversity.” After the first class session, many comments from participants noted the diversity of the class. Diversity for the participants was usually related to the variety of research interests or age. James noted the “wide variety of people in the course” (post-class reflection, Class 1). Whitney said there was “diversity [among] the students in experience and interest” (post-class reflection, Class 1). Others echoed their general observation. George was most

exhaustive in sharing what diversity meant to him: “I was appreciative of the diversity (age, gender, religion, experience, education) that our class has and what I can learn about others (and share about myself)” (post-class reflection, Class 1).

An element of comparison or categorization was evident in many statements in this subtheme. After the first class session, Ben noted the impact the 9/11 attacks had on class members, Thomas and Brian noted religious differences, Phil observed that no student was studying the natural sciences, Jackie noted who said ““I am _____”” versus ““My name is _____””, and Barbara and Sonia noted the common interest everyone had in phenomenology. These statements were all relatively superficial in comparison to the reflections garnered in subsequent post-class reflections and statements in the focus groups and individual interviews. While comments in this subtheme were present throughout the data, around two thirds of such comments came in the first third of the course.

In the third class session, there was an activity in which participants shared passages from a class reading that stood out to them. This was another time in which participants noted diversity and commonality in their selections. For Brian, it stood out that he “marked the same passage as nothingness guy [Alexander] (I don’t see his name)” (post-class reflection, Class 3). Brian notes that despite a superficial difference (he refers to Alexander by one of his philosophical interests), the same passage “sang” to them both. Barbara also noted similarity and difference within overlap: “As people read passages aloud, I had some of the same sections starred in my text. But their vocal inflections indicated that different words and phrases stood out for them” (post-class reflection, Class 3).

After the fourth class session, Phil made a connection between the diversity of perspectives and the perceiver: “In our group, different members had very different interpretation of certain passages...Seemed related to individual interests and backgrounds” (post-class reflection). Remarking on the group work that happened during that class session, Whitney wrote, “When people are of seven varying backgrounds and are interested in phenomenology group work is fascinating. The degree of awareness, courage, experiences are extraordinary. I really enjoyed working with so many other minds discussing this topic” (post-class reflection). What began as diversity based on categories like age transitioned to diversity of perspectives based on the experiences and backgrounds of other participants. At some point in the course, every participant remarked on the diversity of student perspectives. The next subtheme, “Seeing Variations,” was the next step in the progression of “Coming to Appreciate Variations.”

“*Seeing Variations.*” Participants began seeing diversity, and progressed to seeing variations in the phenomenological sense of the term. A variation is a kind of example, as discussed in Chapter 3. After the seventh class session, as noted above in the discussion of the Mark Strand poem, Barbara made a statement evidencing a deeper engagement with differences and similarities:

I liked hearing so many interpretations of the poem. I had a sense of trying each one on (like a hat) to see if I can relate this particular view point to my own experiences. I especially like it that I can accept completely opposite point of view as being true. I have experienced both points of view. So, I see no conflict. And a-ha! I am seeing ‘variations’! (post-class reflection)

Here Barbara poetically provides the subtheme name and describes how she sees from another perspective and “tries it on.” Lisa remarked on the same activity that she could see the different interpretations of the poem in a similar way to how the Rubin figure (the vases and faces illusion) pops back and forth between what is figure and what is ground. She made a similar comment during the class session (as can be seen in the transcript of the audio from the poem discussion above). Barbara’s quote marks around variations likely refer to a course reading, Ihde’s (1986) description of Husserl’s imaginative variation, in which variations are equalized in order to find the essence of the phenomenon. Her a-ha moment is an expression of progress towards seeing phenomenologically.

“Seeing Variations” was a relatively constant feature of the class session data except for much larger numbers of examples in class session 7 post-class reflections, the focus groups, and individual interviews. In most class sessions there would be around 2-3 instances of “Seeing Variations” in the post-class reflection data. In the 14th and 15th class sessions, there were four and five instances, respectively. In the seventh class session, there were 12. In the focus groups, there were 27 examples. In the individual interviews, each participant described at least one example of “Seeing Variations,” with an average of 5 to 6. The following quote from Sonia shows that participants used “Seeing Variations” to help them learn or confirm what they were learning:

You know and by talking it out loud, that helps, especially getting through some of the [laughing] *readings and things* that we’re doing but...talking out loud in class and listening to other people and bouncing off that, I have those “Oh. Ok.

That's ok. I thought that's what I thought about that, but [laughing] *ok*. But I get that now.

The vast majority of participants “Saw Variations” (18/21) to assist in learning the content of the course. Many participants in each focus group mentioned this theme. Donna shows with her quote below that she not only “Saw Variations,” but that the knowledge she gained helped motivate her to engage more deeply with the next week's readings.

A lot of the questions that I have in the readings...I understand in a new and a better way through others sharing their experiences, and what is shared in class by individuals who have different levels of experience. And that shapes my understanding in a new way. And it gives me things to digest and to think about and it compels me to be more interested in the readings next week (focus group 1).

“Seeing Variations” also helped Kari Ann and James gather courage for the next set of “opaque” readings. For James, “Seeing Variations” was critical for him to continue attempting to read the difficult selections. In his individual interview, he explained his frustration after reading assigned chapters by Merleau-Ponty: “I don't even know what I just read.” But in class, the other perspectives gave him a “wealth of knowledge of even points where I didn't necessarily see what they were talking about until I got [there].”

Some participants, like George and Lois, remarked that they learned something from every other class member's contributions. With Alexander and Lisa, learning from others was marked as different due to their experience. Lisa said that despite having “been around a long

time and done therapy, you know, my own *therapy*,” she was “amazed” that in the setting of a graduate course, she “discovered stuff about [her]self and about [her] relationships” (individual interview). For Alexander, it was exciting that “after years of thinking about thinking and perspectives” almost every class he gained a “fresh perspective on something.” He said, “But in this class, I found myself, you know, just boom! Subtle shifts in my own perception in the way of viewing things” (individual interview). While the learning described in this theme is strong, the final subtheme of “Coming to Appreciate Variations” shows that participants in the course did more than learn content and transfer the knowledge into their personal and professional lives.

“Changes in Being.” In the most profound level of learning through others, participants experienced “Changes in Being.” Participants related the diverse perspectives presented in the course (including their own) and reflected inward on who they were as people. Some made changes in their being, in their approaches to the world. Part of what is included in this theme is that participants expressed knowledge of the content, but the content was personalized to such an extent that they interacted differently with those around them.

Sonia and Blake noted generally that the course had changed them. After the 15th class session, Blake reflected on the “remarkable” improvement in how much “we” understand Merleau-Ponty and “I realized just how much my understanding of phenomenology has changed, and how I have changed from my understanding of phenomenology” (post-class reflection). Sonia reflected in her individual interview that “I’m in the subject, I’m a part of it...I’m helping to create it, and it’s helping to create me...”

Perhaps in part due to the course focus on existentialism, it was at times difficult to distinguish between deep learning of content and changes in being. The self and content were intertwined, as evident in the following quote from Alexander. Through the examination and discussion of “significant others” (the class activity involved students making a list of people important in their lives), he reflected on himself and came to a new realization.

I once thought that I kept others at a distance because I didn’t want to deal with their “baggage” – but now I think it could be due to the fact that I like who I am and other people invariably change us. (post-class reflection, Class 13)

He returned to discuss this same realization in the focus group, showing its importance and weight for his understanding of himself.

George, like Barbara, described learning as growing and noted, “Every single person in that class contributed to my growth. Every one” (individual interview). He also used the term healing and described what happened for him through other participants’ perspectives during focus group 2:

I found because of my peers, because of all of you, [prolonged pause] I saw a lot of different ways of being, some similar ways of being that made me feel okay with who *I* am. And, I really wanted to...I developed a desire to really want to grow and change.

Specifically, George noted that he began to value things that he did not value before. Blake and James made similar remarks regarding gaining an appreciation for art and poetry. James said he wanted to start going to art museums with his wife as an activity they could do together.

Other participants changed in ways that related to values and conceptual understanding.

Whitney described her “Changes in Being” as follows:

I think I really enjoy...the awareness...of self, the awareness of others' perspectives and...I think just getting a new perspective to your positionality within the world and your own world and how it relates to other people. And so, just tying in that awareness, you know, with all the different backgrounds we've had and different experiences. It's just been really interesting. And I think that makes, at least in my own experience, has made me really reflective and, um, kind of analytical on my own sort of being, which I think is nice. And it's healthy, to appreciate that. It's almost like therapy.

She sees differences and similarities, turns her attention inward, sees how her perspectives are related to her positionality, her background, and experience, and then reflects on her “being” and finds it therapeutic. One specific change for Whitney was in relation to her view of time. She had recently divorced her husband, and felt time was “a sentence—a road map,” but through discussions in class came to see it as an “opportunity[,] a fluid expanse[,] something that just is. I have been released from a ‘road map’ that is regulated by society’s judgment – Thank you!” (post-class reflection, Class 9).

Phil reflected after the final class session that “everyone learned a lot, and not just about philosophy/psychology.” He noted that he “became a much better listener at times when I strongly disagreed or wasn’t interested. This led me to be able to appreciate other points of view

much more than before” (post-class reflection). Jackie felt a sense of democracy in the course because “it seemed to be run by the class.”

And I really think there’s a bigger message that we’ve learnt from this class and that, you know, hearing everybody else’s differences in perceptions on the same picture or piece of art or poem or what have you, and it teaches us to respect other people’s opinions and to stop and listen and to learn from somebody else’s perception even when it’s so different than ours. And I think that helps us not only as students, but as, you know, as just citizens of our community. (focus group 1)

Barbara echoed Phil and Jackie, declaring that she will come out of the class with “more openness to the experiences and people [she] might encounter in the future...to engage them in dialogue better such that both of us could learn from each other” (focus group 1).

With these participant quotes, “Coming to Appreciate Variations” can be seen as a progression from social comparison with others to learning from others to integrating and becoming with others. The ground of togetherness expressed in “All Together in This Space;” the “Investment” in the forms of “Responsibility,” the effort of “Getting Hands Dirty,” and “Genuineness” of participants; being “Completely Caught Up” in each other’s stories and ideas; and “Coming to Appreciate Variations” were all part of the gestalt of the student experience of other students. Without one of these themes, all the others would have been different.

Caveats and Exceptions

With 21 students registered in a course, it would take an intentional sort of myopia to not see caveats or exceptions to the thematic structure presented above. In this section I share some

of those caveats, exceptions, and other trends made possible in part due to the data collected for the PEER case study of EPP. I begin by describing differences related to class sessions and then discuss differences in individual participants.

Class sessions.

The quantity of SEOS-related data within post-class reflections did not progress in a linear fashion over the length of the course. On the post-class reflections, the documented SEOS was highest in the seventh class session. The least documented SEOS occurred during the sixth and fourteenth class sessions. The seventh class session included interview exercises such as the wedding interview and the poem discussion, included above. It was the class session with the most frequent student contributions. There were five class sessions in which all students present talked, but in the seventh class session, everyone spoke, and 13 of the 19 present spoke five or more times. In comparison, in the sixth class session, 15 of 16 participants present spoke, but only 8 of the 16 spoke five or more times. These numerical differences provide little insight into the phenomenon of SEOS, but looking at the content of the class sessions does. The sixth class had no activities designed with a leadership role for students. There were discussions and research activities, but the instructor led all of them.

Individuals and differences.

Due to the variety of the data by participant and the phenomenological nature of data collection, it was not possible to know all participants' SEOS. There were dramatic numerical differences between students' SEOS word counts: some students were more grounded in the thematic structure in that the majority of their reflections included or alluded to other students.

The most student-focused participant was George. The least was Meg. For George, there were over 4000 words of SEOS data, for Meg, there were around 150. Meg was absent five class sessions, and George had perfect attendance, but Steven and Ingrid, both of whom had taken the course before, were absent more than Meg and had higher SEOS word counts. Thomas, who had around 800 words of SEOS data (less than half the average but above the median of 645), was aware of this difference toward the end of the course:

I began very immersed and involved in the readings and thought – particularly as it applied to my research, but not very much of a relational stance. This appears different from some other students. Later in the semester, I have experienced a crunch in other work, research, clinical training. This led to decreasing my investment in the class, but still very much enjoying and respecting it. (post-class reflection, Class 15)

Thomas took a less relational stance than his peers in part due to other priorities. In his individual interview, he expressed an excitement about the content of the course and discussed specific ways it influenced his practice as a therapist, but he only mentioned others two times, and they were general references in relation to group activities. It could also be said that Meg did not take a relational stance. In the 10 class sessions she was present, and within the 30 incidents that stood out to her from those class sessions, only four of them were categorized as SEOS, and only one of those four was about a specific experience of other. For Meg, the ideas of the course stood out more than the other students in the classroom.

In contrast, James, Kari Ann, and George, all with SEOS word counts above 3000, invoked other students in their reflections at least once per post-class reflection and many times in the focus groups and individual interviews. Kari Ann talked extensively of “connecting” with other students. James described his main mode of learning in the course as listening to other students. His reflections often “Spilled Out” from something someone had said in class to his personal life. George was unique among participants in that he wanted all the other participants to talk more. In his individual interview, he said, “others need to carry their weight” in reference to speaking in class and that “silence is just a killer.” In the second focus group, he pointed out Blake as an example of a participant he wanted to have heard more from throughout the course. “I didn’t get enough of you,” George told him, in reference to his refrain that “I want to learn from others” (individual interview) or “I learn best when others contribute to my growth” (post-class reflection, Class 12).

So while George and his SEOS were representative of the major themes, he, more so than others, expressed his desires for what he would have liked to see occur more frequently in the course. He lamented when others did not speak, when a topic was not discussed as thoroughly as he would like, and that there were no indicators of what he had contributed to others. No other participant was as detailed as George in what could be taken as constructive critique of the course and its participants’ participation, nor was any participant as effusive with positive comments.

Other participant differences were clear in language reflecting levels of emotional engagement. Mark, for example, tended to use the word “interesting” and maintained a kind of

intellectual stance until the final class session, in which he was “struck” during an activity that included an interview transcript that he said displayed “emotion and power” (post-class reflection, Class 15). In contrast, many participants used language to indicate more than an intellectual level of engagement. Lisa described the course and its activities as a “full-body” experience, and Blake remarked on the “physicality” of the learning experience. Lois described the course conversations as a “bursting forth” of learning.

Donna was one of the few participants who expressed anxiety in her reflections. In contrast, for Kari Ann, the EPP course was the “happy part” of her day (focus group 1). Thomas found the atmosphere “open and engaging...People sharing their stories to bring a richer experience to the classroom. It was like a relief, so I would come in and relax” (focus group 2). Other participants also felt relaxed (Blake, Lisa, George).

The idiosyncrasies reviewed in this section do not diminish the thematic structure, but are important to keep in mind when I review my study limitations in Chapter 5.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented the thematic structure of the SEOS, illustrative episodes of the course, support for the themes, and some notable exceptions to the themes in the data. The personal stories, artifacts, and activities of the course provided the setting for a SEOS that was composed of “Investment,” being “Completely Caught Up,” and “Coming to Appreciate Variations” on a ground of “All Together in This Space.”

From the ground, the themes arise and have some points of overlap. Participants were “All Together,” and while together during class and after, they saw each other’s “Investments.”

As they perceived peer “Investment,” they were “Completely Caught Up.” Over the length of the course, participants “Came to Appreciate Variations” as a part of their experience. These themes are a gestalt—without one of the elements of the thematic structure, the experience would have been different for participants. I do not suggest a causal relationship between the themes, but note that these themes exist together and can be interpreted to draw conclusions about transformative learning, classroom climate, and philosophy of education. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings, their implications, and further questions raised by these results.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

I began this dissertation with my personal experience of the Existential Phenomenological Psychology (EPP) course. In EPP, there was high student involvement (Astin, 1984) and high levels of participation, every student was assured an A for their final grade, and the instructor taught using a phenomenological pedagogy (Franklin, 2013). My classmates and I experienced transformative learning: we realized course content in our lives (Greenberg et al., 2015). I discussed the need for a study of the classroom climate of the EPP course, focusing specifically on the student experience of other students (SEOS). In Chapter 2, I reviewed relevant literature and after careful searching over a period of two years, found few qualitative studies of the SEOS in a higher education setting, evidencing further need for my study. In Chapter 3, I described the phenomenological case study method I used. I took on a phenomenological attitude, engaged in bracketing exercises to become aware of my assumptions and biases, and proceeded to analyze the data on my own and with assistance from an interpretive research group (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

In Chapter 4, I presented my results with primary focus on the thematic structure of the student experience of other students and a selected number of course episodes. The episodes served to contextualize the thematic structure. Through participant experiences like the episodes of personal stories, course activities like phenomenological interviewing, and discussions of artifacts like poems, students experienced each other as “Invested;” they were “Completely Caught Up” in each other’s stories; and they “Came to Appreciate Variations.” These themes

emerged from the ground of being “All Together in This Space.” The thematic structure is represented in the Figure 1.

One can see in Figure 1 that the triangular panels overlap with the ground and meet above the center of the grounding hexagon. The participants experienced the three themes as equally figural—there were a similar number of meaning units for each one. The difference in size of the triangles in the figure is due to the use of perspective, not imbalance. The subthemes are located beneath the theme names to show their subordinate nature. For “Investment” and “Completely Caught Up,” the subthemes were aspects of the superordinate theme. With “Coming to Appreciate Variations,” the subthemes were a progression within the theme, which is why there are arrows.

Organization

In this chapter I begin by discussing the results of the episodes, the themes, and their interrelationships. I discuss the themes on their own terms and relate them to existing literature, noting overlap and novelty. In the next section I discuss influences on the data and the limitations of the findings. I then discuss the significance of the findings and provide recommendations in relation to transformative learning, classroom climate, and philosophy of education based on the results. Finally, I offer ideas for future research and conclusions.

Results and Implications

In this section I discuss the results and implications of the themes and subthemes. Throughout I attempt to place the results in the context of literature from Chapter 2 and other

literature that became relevant in light of the data. I begin with a discussion of the ground, “All Together in This Space.”

Ground: “All Together in This Space.”

An important part of the epistemology and ontology of phenomenology is that every phenomenon of perception has elements that stand out against a background. In the EPP course, participants examined the Rubin figure (see Figure 2, below) to experience the figure-ground relationship (for discussion, refer to Chapter 3). I presented the results of this study in figure-ground terms with a representation of the thematic structure of the SEOS (see Figure 1, above). The ground, the context in which the other themes stood out to participants, was a sense of togetherness and collegiality captured with Donna’s phrase, “All Together in This Space.” In this section I will discuss the ground in terms of the importance of the first class sessions, a “hive mentality” (Haidt, 2012), and a common existential project.

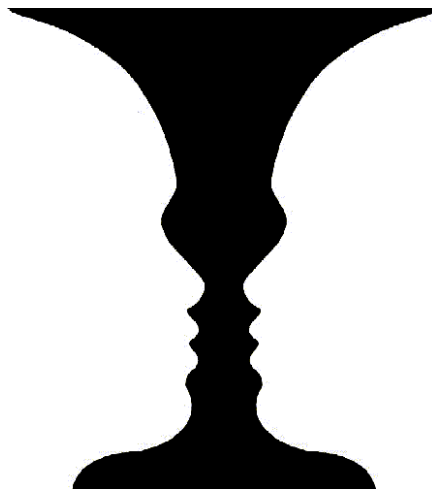


Figure 2. Rubin Figure

Many metaphors are used when a group process is going well—a team, a well-oiled machine, a hive. Haidt (2012), in his discussion of a *hive mentality*, describes the power of group behavior, citing examples from the dedication military unit members feel for each other. He quotes a member of a military unit that says, “Many veterans who are honest with themselves will admit...that the experience of communal effort in battle...has been the high point of their lives...Their ‘I’ passes insensibly into a ‘we’...” (p. 257). He traces the origins of hive mentality to evolutionary biology, arguing that group survival at times necessitated cooperation and individual sacrifice.

No one in the EPP course was dying or self-sacrificial, but what the course had in common with a military unit or a church was a common existential project, a unifying quest that bonded them “All Together in This Space.” Mezirow (1978) noted the importance of a common existential project for transformative learning. As noted by one professor participant observer, the participants were animated by the “art of being better” (post-class reflection, Class 1). They shared “joy” and “revelry” in their pursuit of learning phenomenology as a way of investigating and as a way of being. If there was a common enemy, it was Descartes and his influence, seen in the technocratic dominance of the fields of psychology, counseling, education, and others. War was not mentioned, but participants discussed a revolution in academia at various times through the course. The diversity perceived among the cohort was not divisive—it spurred interest, and the unity came from the common pursuit of becoming phenomenologists, a point I discuss further below.

The first class sessions were the first times participants were all together in the classroom, and if the *hive switch*, a term Haidt (2012) uses to describe the integration of individuals into a group, was turned on, it was during this time it first occurred. In this course, attendance was not required, and Haidt says it is important for people in a hive to feel like members who choose to be there. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the course did not fulfill any particular requirements—it was a graduate elective. Some course participants had been told by students who had taken the course before that the course would change their lives. Others, like Meg, Sonia, and Brian, were there on a recommendation from their advisors. The course had a reputation, but that is not what stood out to participants about the first class session. What stood out was “Diversity,” personal stories, and ideas about what had brought them together: a common interest in phenomenology and a desire to “go beyond numbers” (Lois, post-class reflection, Class 1).

Haidt (2012) says that when group member similarities are emphasized, hive behavior is more likely to occur. Tinto’s (1997) research similarly advocates for the establishment of a cohort through similarity and connection: “The development of interpersonal relationships was important, because it was against this backdrop of a supportive network of peers that academic engagement arose” (p. 610). But in this study, while similarities were important, what stood out for participants were similarities *and* diversity—diversity of backgrounds, ages, and, as the course went on, ideas and positionality.

It may be that Meg’s story on the first day, along with other participant stories, is what began the establishment of connections between participants. George later remembered feeling

closer to Meg after she shared that her brother had died in the 9/11 attacks. In Chapter 2, I reviewed numerous studies on the importance of instructor disclosure of personal information. It tends to correlate with higher levels of participation (e.g., Rocca, 2010) and can increase sense of belonging (Booker, 2007; Thomas et al., 2007). The transformative learning literature hints at what was seen here: trust and egalitarian relations are among the most common features associated with transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). In an essay on trust, Applebaum (1995), a philosopher of education, notes, “when the teacher reveals something personal about him/herself, students not only feel that they are dealing with a real human being but are confirmed in their perception that the teacher trusts them with this information” (p. 448). Sharing information can be a way of making oneself vulnerable. Yet Meg and other *students* shared personal information, and student sharing was a key aspect of the SEOS. It manifested most often as signs of “Genuineness” and helped to establish the ground of “All Together in This Space.”

Some of the feelings associated with the ground were camaraderie, comfort, validation, and solidarity. There was something special for the EPP course participants who realized the lesson that a “‘we’ is more than a collection of ‘I’s” (Instructor, audio recording, Class 4). At the time, as Brian, I latched on to Lois’ metaphor of the banquet. Eisen (2001) found that to foster transformative learning, trust and egalitarianism were key elements of peer relationships. In the case of the EPP course, trust and egalitarianism were only part of the basis of transformative learning. Equally important were mirth and laughter. Being together in an existential sense does not require trust and egalitarianism—those words describe feelings that can be put on to an

experience in reflection. “All Together in This Space” captures the existential nature of the ground of the SEOS and speaks to a more fundamental connection than the qualities Eisen (2001) and Taylor (2007) say foster transformative learning.

The last class session was a time when the ground became explicit to many participants. Class time ended, but participants remained and continued discussion. The instructor noted, “No one wants to break the spell” (audio recording, Class 15). Lois said, “No one wants to break and leave” (post-class reflection, Class 15) and Phil reflected, “We’re all sad this class is over” (post-class reflection, Class 15). This kind of end of class sentiment is absent from classroom climate research, but should be considered by researchers interested in course participant interaction. If a course matters and students are involved in it, sadness, rather than relief, may be expected. It is in the context of the ground of togetherness, connection, support, and camaraderie that the other themes were figural. I next turn to a discussion of “Investment” and its subthemes:

“Responsibility,” “Getting Hands Dirty,” and “Genuineness.” The key difference between the ground and “Investment” is that participants were not just physically together in a classroom being collegial—they put time and effort into the course.

“Investment.”

To invest, in its etymological origins, means to clothe. It was around 1600 that its current general use became common. One puts forth time, effort, or money with the expectation of a return. And with the ground of “All Together in This Space,” the “Investment” in the EPP course SEOS was perceived in contributions students would make to the course, “Responsibility,” “Getting Hands Dirty,” and “Genuineness.” Participation studies often try to capture the degree

to which students invest with behaviors like speaking in class as a proxy (e.g., Fritschner, 2000). Other studies try to capture signs of investment with self-report instruments (e.g., Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010; Weaver & Qi, 2005). My results show a first-person perspective of what it can mean for students to notice the investment of their classmates. First, I discuss “Investment” generally and in relation to time and “Getting Hands Dirty,” then discuss “Responsibility” and “Genuineness.”

“Investment”: Putting forth time and “Getting Hands Dirty.” The idea that students explored, got their hands dirty, and took time to invest was a key part of the SEOS. In a class discussion on time, the instructor pointed out the difference between institutional *Time* and time as experienced (for major points of his discussion, see Pollio, 1982). Exploring topics in depth and “Getting Hands Dirty” requires an investment of Time (and time), and students and the instructor would often speak at length. While some institutional course evaluation forms ask how much time students spend on a course, studies I reviewed in Chapter 2 rarely included mention of time. As with other existential grounds, time is usually a background and only salient when we have too little of it. Galanes and Carmack’s (2013) “good” students engage and participate, but they also take time to help other students.

While Time still governed class session length, another institutional feature of higher education, grades, did not govern participants. Students knew that whatever time and effort they put into the EPP course, the result on their transcript would be the same. That they did not have to “earn” an A may have devalued the grade, so they took on learning and understanding as the return on investment they would value. Students were not focused on what they had to do to earn

points. Their assignments outside of class were all readings specified in the syllabus. In this course, the “tail” of grades did not “wag the dog” of learning (Pollio & Beck, 2000). Grades are often used as a “control mechanism,” but for this course, the instructor used social pressure. He told students during the first class session, “these are your colleagues” and they will know “what you did when you were given freedom” (EPP Instructor, audio recording from Class 1). With an A guaranteed, students could explore the difficult topic of phenomenology (or not). The instructor abrogated one of the usual accountability mechanisms used to ensure students engage with course material. But, as noted, students experienced each other as “Invested” and in my review of literature I found no studies of courses in which a similar grading procedure was used.

Walton’s (2010) only mention of grades was procedural: only after grades were posted did he seek participants for his study. He found similar qualitative results to EPP, and he focused on creating a collegial, non-competitive classroom climate and students reported transformative learning. The question as to whether or not the elimination of grades is *required* to foster deep student engagement remains open.

None of the studies on participation I reviewed considered grades as a salient independent variable. Yet if students are not “vying to be top dog” (Barbara, focus group 1), it is understandable that inhibition may be lowered. Weaver and Qi (2005) found that student participation increases when the professor is not perceived as the sole authority in the classroom. This perception of instructor authority is inversely correlated with student-faculty interactions, particularly those that happen outside of class time. But Weaver and Qi did not examine student-student interaction as one of their nine variables of interest, so they could reach no conclusions

regarding whether or not student-student connectedness may have affected perceptions of instructor authority. But the instructor in EPP reduced the typical authority of the instructor by taking on a stance of learner (N. Greenberg et al., 2015) and by assuring students they had an A during the first class session. The connections students felt to each other “All Together in This Space” were facilitated by the removal of the institution of grades.

“Responsibility.” Another aspect of “Investment” that was part of the SEOS was the sense of responsibility students felt to each other and their ability to respond appropriately. When there is no responsibility to others, or if the responsibility to others in a course is instrumental, students must achieve for themselves alone, sometimes by cheating (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999). Yet in EPP, with the absence of grades and in the presence of relational networks, there was no evidence that students attempted to impress each other through personal pursuit of understanding. In the cases where personal attributions of intelligence were made, they were usually accompanied by appreciation for the unique perspectives provided from those intelligent people, an aspect of “Coming to Appreciate Variations.” Students assuredly evidenced personal pursuit of understanding—they asked questions, shared ideas, and engaged in extensive self-reflection during class sessions and on the post-class reflection forms—but it did not stand out to participants.

Being responsible was part of ensuring the activities that were planned went well. As in Zeeman and Lotriet (2013), part of the design of the course integrated the personal investment of the course participants. One noted, “we had to do research ourselves” (p. 187). If participants did not take responsibility for the activities, and instead adopted a checklist mentality—get activities

done in order to move on to the next thing—less learning would have occurred. But results like those of Zeeman and Lotriet and the ones from this course are powerful because the checklist mentality does not dominate student orientation, and students, too, note the uniqueness of the courses. Being “Genuine,” too, is a different orientation to learning than that of the checklist approach. I discuss it next.

“Genuine.” With time, with a cooperative as opposed to competitive atmosphere, and with “Responsibility,” students saw each other as “Genuine.” They had genuine questions, stories, and interpersonal interactions. During class session 12, course participants discussed the idea of genuineness and playing a role in regards to the social worlds of which we are all a part. In many discussions of roles, Goffman’s concept of impression management (in Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) figures centrally. There was the possibility that participants could have perceived other students as performing, managing their impressions, or generally playing the role of “graduate student,” whatever that may mean for each participant. This was not the case. In the words of participants, they did not see others as trying to be “top dog,” they pursued the “heart of matters” as “learners” rather than students, and collaborated in a “joyful” “reverie.” (Barbara, Lois, Lisa, and Kelly, respectively). Without the context of “All Together in This Space,” being “Genuine” might not have stood out as clearly. While the focus group participants of Galanes and Carmack (2013) did not specifically use the word “investment” in their descriptions of “good” students, the behaviors noted such as helping others instrumentally and academically, participating enthusiastically, and being respectful all fall in line with the kinds of SEOS that stood out to the participants of EPP as representative of “Investment.”

Likewise, Dwyer et al.'s (2004) Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI) contained items with similar language to that used in this study's SEOS. Participants in the EPP course "show[ed] interest in what one another [were] saying," "share[d] stories and experiences with one another," and "engage[d] in small talk with one another" (p. 268). These elements of the SEOS led to a perception of authenticity.

In transformative learning theory, authenticity is of central concern for Cranton (e.g., Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Carussetta, 2004), who defines authenticity as aligning actions with values. The instructor of EPP worked carefully in his planning to embody in his lessons the ontology and epistemology of phenomenology (Franklin, 2013). This intentional alignment of ontology, epistemology, and teaching fits well with Cranton's definition of authenticity, and the design of the lessons encouraged students to see, understand, and enact phenomenological principles like describing rather than explaining or setting aside prior assumptions.

Phenomenologists seek descriptions of lived experience in their pursuit of knowledge, and EPP students shared personal stories during class sessions together and in small-group interview exercises. Cranton (2006) presented various profiles of teacher authenticity. An extension of my study could be to develop profiles of *learner* authenticity.

Part of the worldview espoused through phenomenology by the instructor ran counter to the objectivist or rationalist worldview so commonly held by educated people (Henrich, Heine, and Nornzayan, 2010). Personal stories were perceived as "Genuine" and fulfilled the instructional goal to not be a neutral observer outside of the phenomenon of interest, but rather to interact with and in the phenomenon, to live it. Students saw this in each other through the

questions they asked, the stories they told, and the “intimate” nature of classroom interactions. And it was in these “Genuine” stories that participants often experienced the second major theme, “Completely Caught Up.”

“Completely Caught Up.”

On the foundation of “All Together in This Space,” and with the “Investment” of others that participants experienced, participants got “Completely Caught Up” in each other and the content. The line between students and the content was blurred. As Sonia said, “I’m in the subject, I’m a part of it...I’m helping to create it, and it’s helping to create me...” (individual interview). In this section I discuss the theme “Completely Caught Up” in relation to personal stories and embodied learning. I discuss the subtheme, “Spilling Out,” in terms of application and transformative learning.

The stories shared within the classroom, from birth to death, from profound to silly, were compelling. Van Manen (2014) describes the potential for writing to “voke”—to stir something inside of a reader physically. Yet stories can do the same, and getting caught up might be described by van Manen as experiencing revocation and evocation. A *revocative* story “bring[s] experience vividly into presence” (van Manen, 2014, p. 241), and can be seen when Kari Ann wrote that she was “completely caught up” in Lois’ story of watching the 9/11 attacks unfold. Kari Ann expressed a kind of embodied reaction to the story through metaphors like, “I was on the edge of my seat as if I didn’t know what was going to happen next” (post-class reflection, Class 11). The experience of body and mind integration indicated by the thematic structure is sometimes described as “affective learning” (Schunk, 2012), but more relevant to the EPP course

are descriptions of emotion combined with learning experiences in which participants were trapped.

In the work of Langan and her colleagues (Langan et al., 2007; 2009), emotions were strong in reaction to “disruptions,” and Macdonald (2013), according to her students, provoked discomfort. These studies found evidence of transformative learning through designing activities that confronted students with content that made them uncomfortable. The instructors had the intent to inspire changes in students’ frames of reference regarding issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Their methods for doing so did not directly challenge perception—as the content did in the EPP course. A challenge to perception may lead to greater changes in the ways students interact with others in their lives in a fundamental way that transcends formalist issues like race, class, and gender. It also may allow students to ignore such issues and perpetuate daily injustices. But what the studies have in common is an emotional engagement on the part of participants. Langan et al. (2009) emphasized relational learning in their course, another commonality with the EPP course.

Student anecdotes served to make the content real in a way that “launched a world,” to use the words of the instructor—the learners’ worlds of experience (Franklin, 2013). They were able to live through the experiences their peers shared and the course content was made vivid, or given life. Participants described being “Completely Caught Up” using emotion-laden language like “love,” “exciting,” and “alive” alongside more cognitive descriptions like “interesting.” It would be difficult to get “Caught Up” in an atmosphere they perceived as unsafe.

For Holley and Steiner's (2005) participants, not being judged was a common element of safe classrooms, and in safe classrooms, students learned from others' experiences and stories. In EPP, students and instructor withheld judgment. Only four of the 992 post-class comments included language that was clearly indicative of students judging other students negatively. Yet unlike in Holley and Steiner (2005), in this study and the other studies of PEER, readers can get a deeper sense of what it means for participants to be in a course they consider safe and how that experience can influence the application of course content.

To evoke, according to van Manen (2014), is to speak to the reader or listener in a profound way. When, for example, Lisa told a story about a mother moving a child's toys from a bed to a shelf (Class 12), Donna and Ingrid were "spoken to." Donna recalled the awe of interacting non-verbally with her niece, and Ingrid commented on the beauty of Buber's concept of I-Thou relationships. In this case, the story "spoke" to them in a way that revealed some aesthetic truth of the world. Feeling spoken to is an experience that stands out in a world in which people often feel isolated or alienated. In a university setting, the institutional expectations or norms are such that students do not expect to be spoken to. But when spoken to or living through an experience with someone through their story, it is difficult to step outside the moment and reflect.

If one is not stepping outside of an experience to reflect on it, the typical rush to categorize or schematize knowledge is stalled. According to cognitive learning theorists, schematization of environmental stimuli is a spontaneous act of learning by humans (e.g., Schunk, 2012), and Boler (1999) says, "The desire to order chaos through simplified schemas, to

ward off the felt dangers of ambiguity, seems perhaps more ‘human’ a characteristic than any other” (p. 175). What stories can do is put off that categorization, which can serve to illuminate subtlety that would otherwise be lost. In Piaget’s terms, compelling stories and artifacts can allow learners to stick with disequilibrium longer. In Boler’s (1999) terms, they allow a learner the opportunity to “inhabit an ambiguous sense of self” (p. 188). With a story that was revocative like Lois’ or one that was evocative like Lisa’s, participants were taken out of the natural attitude and the thoughts and feelings gained a kind of momentum and “Spilled Out” to other areas of their life.

“Spilling Out.” The course spilled out into the hall in the form of conversations and course activities that continued when the class was over and spontaneous application of course content in the personal and professional lives of the students. Often due to the classroom-bound nature of observational and survey studies, along with the typical etic orientation of most research, classroom climate research only rarely sheds light on the moments that are not class time. Weaver & Qi (2005) found that interaction with faculty before and after class time was among the strongest predictors of self-reported participation. When the “conversation spilled out into the hall,” (Lois, individual interview) students were too caught up in course content to draw the usual lines of division between who they were during class time and who they were outside of it. Here again the “Genuineness” experienced by students as investment shows an authentic engagement as learners, not just students. Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield’s (2010) study showed through survey instruments that more student-student connections trump teacher confirmation behaviors in predicting higher student involvement inside and outside the

classroom. When students have strong connections with each other, they can listen to each other for more than information gathering purposes.

Alexander's collaboration on a dance performance at a community college for a fundraiser is one of the most public accounts of the course "Spilling Out." Questions about who moves who in the dancer-audience relationship emerged from discussions in EPP. He wrote a piece called "The Philosophy of Dance," and his colleague choreographed a routine for it. This is another example, like mine from Chapter 1, in which participants were "Completely Caught Up" in the course content and it "Spilled Out" into talks with friends, families, and colleagues about the course. More commonly participants talked to loved ones, but even acquaintances and colleagues were mentioned in the data. These instances of "Spilling Out" reveal another aspect of "Investment." Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement discusses many areas of non-classroom activities that indicate student commitment, and his basis in Freud's concept of *cathexis*—the investment by an individual of psychological energy in objects and persons—seems well suited to participants in this course. But the research that followed Astin's lead (e.g., Tinto, 1997) was too instrumental to be able to find meaning in results that showed, for example, that cohort development led to higher average grades and greater retention.

Many of the instances of applications to the participants' lives could be considered part of the third major theme, "Coming to Appreciate Variations," since they represent a kind of learning through others' perspectives. Often participant experiences of other students showed two or more themes at once. This is one of the key ways the themes relate to each other: there

was a gestalt of being together, “Investment,” being “Completely Caught Up,” and “Coming to Appreciate Variations,” which I discuss next.

“Coming to Appreciate Variations.”

The final major theme, “Coming to Appreciate Variations,” describes what it was like for participants to learn from each other in the course. It is composed of three sub-themes that I discuss in turn: “Diversity,” “Seeing Variations,” and “Changes in Being.” The initial, largely superficial reactions to note diversity among other students gave way throughout the course to a phenomenological approach to learning and “Changes in Being” such as becoming better listeners.

“Diversity.” The subtheme of diversity ran throughout the data. Participants noted differences between themselves and other students in the first and final class sessions and each class session in between. But in the later class sessions, their descriptions of differences reflected a different attitude. In the first class sessions students were getting to know each other and shared their personal experiences. When instructors disclose personal information regarding religion and politics, there can be a decrease in student participation (Rocca, 2010). But EPP course members disclosed personal information regularly including feelings on religion and politics, and participation remained high in every class session. From the communications education literature perspective taken by Rocca, talking about religion and politics has mixed results on participation because those topics can be perceived by students as either making the instructor more “immediate” or more distant. Immediacy increases participation. In the first few class sessions, some participants reflected in ways consonant with Rocca’s perspective. But as they progressed

through “Coming to Appreciate Variations,” sharing of all kinds acted to make students and instructor more immediate.

After the first three class sessions, participant’s experiences of other students were optimistic and excited or more focused on differences and displayed a mix of utilitarian and humanist tones. In a phenomenological study of “the human experience of other people,” Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) found that two of the three major themes in their data were “Comparison” and “Benefit.” The latter theme had to do with people being either useful and satisfying or annoying and hindering, and the former with categorization in terms of similarities and differences. The sense of “Comparison” and “Benefit” dominated the early SEOS over the other major theme of their study, “Relationship.” George was interested in what he could learn about others, but also wanted those who did not speak up to talk because he “would enjoy their involvement in [his] growth” (post-class reflection, Class 2). Steven was focused on how the personal stories of the participants “created a rich field to see themes,” which was something he “could use in other educational environments” (post-class reflection, Class 1). Sonia as well seemed more focused on how diversity and the “many disciplines” could help *her* develop meaning. But almost no participant responses echoed the findings from Fritschner (2000) or Purcell (2010) that found participants get irritated with students who talk a lot (there were only two potential exceptions). Instead, the reactions after the first few class sessions indicated participants by and large had a more open stance to their classmates. The sentiment of the majority of the participants could be captured by a “celebrate diversity” bumper sticker. This openness manifested as participants spent more time together in subsequent class sessions.

During the second class session, there were many activities with visual phenomena. Phil noted that “a lot of people saw things [he] couldn’t see” (post-class reflection, Class 2). This is a step beyond simply noticing (and noting) diversity. In the activity, differences manifest for Phil in terms of seeing. He does not say that other’s seeing contributed to his ability to see differently—not yet: in a later class session he said, “a description, if thorough enough, can cause a change in perception” (audio recording, Class 5).

As participants shared passages from an assigned reading in Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010) during the third class session, they noted when others had chosen similar and different passages. This activity stood out to five participants. In this part of the progression from “Diversity” to “Seeing Variations,” students saw similarities and differences with others in relation to textual material. This was part of a process of building from concrete differences in visual perception to differences in perception generally.

What exact kind of connection was made between those that chose the same passages is hard to tell from the data, but for Brian, he was surprised to find something in common with Alexander. Others, too, may have felt either surprise or the same kind of connection you might feel when you learn that a new acquaintance loves the same obscure song that you do. With the idea of evocative text from van Manen (2014), when the same text or song speaks to you and another person, you know you have something important in common, and this building of commonality through experience helped participants experience each other more as in “Relationship” than simply see each other for “Benefit” or in “Comparison” (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

Yet the diversity of perspectives, even when participants had chosen the same passage, was noted by Barbara—she noticed that a participant who had chosen the same passage as her read it emphasizing different words, showing a different interpretation. It was after this class session (3) that more participants began the transition to “Seeing Variations.”

Phil, Whitney, and Blake put this transition into words. The “very different interpretations” (Phil, post-class reflection, Class 4) with “people of seven varying backgrounds” (Whitney, post-class reflection, Class 4) helps “you realize that your perspective is limited, and that others have a lot to offer” (Blake, post-class reflection, Class 4). These statements bring to mind the Millay (in Mottern, 2011) poem I cited in Chapter 3:

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.

In the SEOS, participants became aware of the limits of their own perspective and that it could be enlarged by listening to “very different interpretations” of the same object. And whether this object was a Necker cube (see Figure 3) or a difficult reading, the different perspectives helped participants see potential for looking beyond their own mountains and woods. As they were opened up to new territory, their learning became deeper as they “Saw Variations.”

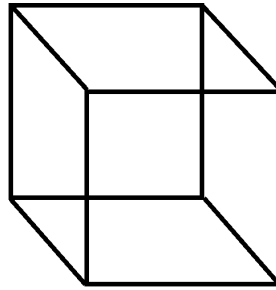


Figure 3. Necker Cube

“Seeing Variations.” As the learning through others became deeper, the overlap between applications that “Spilled Out” into the lives of participants with “Seeing Variations” becomes clear. But at times “Seeing Variations” was more cognitively focused: the participant seemed more deliberate or contemplative and less in a rush of ideas or activity continuation. During the discussion of the Mark Strand poem, the transcript of which I provided in Chapter 4, George and Lisa disagreed about whether or not the field in the poem is different when the narrator leaves it. Lisa drew an analogy to the Rubin figure: “It’s like the vase, and the faces” (audio recording, Class 7). With this analogy she related the perception of the poem to the perception of the visual figure, implying that neither interpretation of the field is incorrect. The ability to hold various, at times contrasting, perceptions of an object of perception is a key element of the phenomenological reduction (Ihde, 1986). In order to peel away the layers of the natural attitude, in which objects are perceived without consideration of their essences, a phenomenologist must imagine an object from varying perspectives. In Chapter 3, I shared Ihde’s discussion of the Cartesian and the Druid examining a tree. The perspectives, termed “variations” are given equal credence in order to find the essence of the phenomenon.

If, as van Manen (2014) says, phenomenology is a science of examples (a term he uses in place of variations), the ability of participants to see examples/variations as equally plausible is a key step in overcoming the natural attitude and the orientation of critical thinking that seeks through argument to establish a “best” answer. “Seeing Variations” is an alternative to the emphasis on rational thinking so often encouraged in academic settings. For van Manen, the “example” is not simply an illustration of a point given in order to convince a listener to adopt the perspective of the speaker, rather, “the phenomenological example actually reconciles the incommensurable couplet of the particular and the universal” (p. 260). And in the language of the participants, too, van Manen’s idea finds expression: as Lois said after a class exercise reading an interview transcript, “I was struck by the multiple layers of the reading of the text, the unfolding of the [interviewee’s] story, though different and singular, became universal” (post-class reflection, Class 5). The connection of content to the universal by students is a critical attribute of transformative learning (N. Greenberg et al., 2015).

For a deep and integrative learning of course content that may not fit within existing student frames of reference, learning through others might not simply be facilitating, it may be necessary. There were many instances in the data in which participants reported coming to class confused about a reading, but after listening to another student or students’ interpretations, the message of the author became clear. Haidt (2001; 2012), in a discussion related to people making changes in their morality, shows the necessity of a peer in encouraging change. The peer in effect plants a seed that allows the learner to not reject a new idea when it is counter-intuitive. In EPP,

“Seeing Variations” was what many students needed to “digest” the difficult readings and maintain interest in the next assignment.

But this idea of *learning* or even *digesting* the content, or achieving a greater understanding of it, is quite a different experience than being given a sense of the aesthetics of a concept. At times the two were linked for participants, as can be seen in Ingrid’s reflection, “Lisa’s description of an adult/child interaction as well as other examples helped me think about the beauty/purity of the I-Thou relationship” (post-class reflection, Class 12). Talk of beauty and purity does sometimes accompany topics of college courses, whether they are about physics or poetry, but in the world of educational psychology the interest is more focused on transfer or metacognitive skills. These terms could be used to describe the deeper learning exemplified by “Seeing Variations,” but they miss the powerful meaningfulness expressed in the SEOS that comes when learning relationally.

“Changes in Being.” The relational learning, at its most profound, was described by participants as an experience of changes in their being. Some participants highlighted the democratic nature of the course as a model way of learning, the ability to listen to others more carefully in the face of disagreements, experiencing an integrative vision of the world, and feelings of healing in regard to traumatic events like the 9/11 attacks. The full extent of “Coming to Appreciate Variations” involved a relational, egalitarian immersion into different examples of a personally relevant topic. Through this immersion, participants turned inward in reflection and made “Changes in Being.” In this section I discuss the most common change, becoming a better listener, first. I then discuss the importance of the ground, “All Together in This Space,” to this

subtheme. I end this section with thoughts on how the course content, existential phenomenology, became a part of who the participants were.

Many participants were explicit in their realization of listening into their lives and work. As Brian, I did not report in the data my experience of becoming a better listener, but it was profound. I always thought I had valued listening, but the practice of phenomenology through course activities gave me a new set of tools to more deeply appreciate and hear what other people had to say. That people talk to express more than just information was something I had learned long ago. But that the stories and expressions of needs and desires were connected to a history and a way of being in the world added a new dimension. I discovered my newfound way of being-in-the-world when I talked to my wife's ailing grandmother near the end of the EPP course. She suffered from dementia. By adopting a phenomenological attitude, where I set aside what I thought I knew about her, her condition, and what she needed, I was able to hear her, be with her, and laugh with her in ways that benefitted us both. I had the privilege of not being the full time caretaker, but this listening ability that I became aware of with my wife's grandmother worked its way into other familial and professional situations.

Many instructors want students to apply and transfer the knowledge or content gained in their course to other areas. The broad range of implementation described by participants of EPP enriches the concept of application and helps to define realization as part of transformative learning. We can apply a coat of paint to cover what is underneath, which is a superficial change. We can apply a theory to a situation, which often requires an act of judgment or creativity. But these participants *became* better listeners, which is indicative of a change in orientation and

disposition, not just an internal cognitive change with external manifestations. Such findings go further in helping understand depth of understanding than surveys reporting on the connection between emotions and deep versus surface level approaches to learning (e.g., Trigwell, Ellis, & Han, 2012).

The value of listening was emphasized throughout the course, and was even part of the title of one of the assigned books, *Listening to Patients* (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). But the *practice* of listening took place in the EPP course through exercises like phenomenological interviewing, examination of artifacts like the Mark Strand poem or paintings, and treating difficult philosophical texts as song. What can be seen through the “Coming to Appreciate Variations” theme is the progression in the value participants placed on the first-person perspective.

The connections people felt with each other expressed in the ground, “All Together in this Space,” were a part of their learning experience as expressed in “Coming to Appreciate Variations.” What began as noting differences and similarities grew into a less objective experience of others—a unity or solidarity was possible when seeing phenomenologically. The individual participants’ points of view were one more variation to intertwine with the others in order to understand more deeply the content of the course, which included participants’ lives and how they lived them. The ground, which provided a sense of fellowship, was complemented by the sense of “Responsibility” to each other. As described by George, through connection—he saw ways of being he shared with other students, which made him feel safe in who he was—and through “Coming to Appreciate Variations”—he saw a lot of different ways of being—George

developed a desire to grow and change. This theme echoes Greene's (1988) vision for freedom, in which people come together in a forum as their best selves, share multiple perspectives, and find what they have in common through regard and care, all while in search of themselves (p. xi). The findings of Walton (2010) and Langan et al. (2009) are the only studies that contain comparable results, but neither of them included such complete pictures of the participants' first-person experience in regard to learning through others in a relational classroom climate.

The participants noted kinds of care (Noddings, 1992) amongst each other, at times more explicitly than others. Participants took the opportunity to get to know the strangers that introduced themselves on the first day of class and connect with them through care, validation, confirmation, and solidarity, and they were not held to habitual patterns of being as they may have been by their loved ones. This provided a forum to practice and envision new ways of being. Noddings (1992) says that relationship precedes content because all content is carried through relation. In this course, where relations with others were part of the content, this was true on multiple levels. It was not just that people in relationship *carried* the content to each other. The relations and experiences of others in the course became an embodiment of the content. The lived experience of the existential ground of others was made figural in the design of the course (Franklin, 2013), and in the SEOS, the vast majority of participants made clear the continuous influence of others on their learning.

Summary.

It is in a unifying vision of democracy as a pursuit of collective freedom that students realized the value of democracy in education. In the context of the EPP course, they developed a

key disposition for the success of democracies: listening. But these were all graduate students, the majority of whom were practitioners of one kind or another. With this in mind I summarize the discussion of themes with the idea of participants *becoming phenomenologists*.

To learn to see phenomenologically, to become a phenomenologist, is a radical reorientation for most educated people. In our educational system, the focus on rational thought as the road to Truth is ubiquitous. As Thayer-Bacon (1998) points out, critical thinking has traditionally been defined as the use of logic and taught with such skills as argument analysis, but has neglected other tools of thought such as imagination and intuition. Boler (1999) shows how emotions have been constructed to be an impediment to learning. While discussions in intellectual circles that include the importance of the subconscious, emotional, or intuitive mind can be found in the likes of Freud, Hume, and Einstein (see Haidt, 2012; and N. Greenberg et al., 2015), in discussions of teaching and learning, the focus on cognition is still dominant: emotion has even been sidelined, reclassified by educational psychologists as “hot cognition” (e.g., Schunk, 2012). But the experience for students in EPP was more than an engagement in critical thinking and self-reflection—it was more of a “full-body” experience, as Lisa described:

It's experiences that we've had. You get that full body experience...it's visual...we did some auditory...you get a whole essence of learning, um, and you come away from it changed. I feel like I've really, um, had a change, life changing experience, through this course.

Full-body learning is facilitated by “active learning methodologies” (Ní Raghallaigh & Cunniffe, 2013). The participants in EPP evidenced critical self-reflection, to be sure, but they

also described connections, emotional engagement, and imaginative visions for the integration of course content into their lives. And these changes in many ways reflected an adoption of the epistemology and ontology of phenomenology.

Phenomenology requires a stance of wonder in the face of the world in order to transcend the natural attitude (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2010). Categorization, which was a part of student experience at the beginning of the course—these students are like me, these students are different than me—changed into an appreciation that valued alternative perspectives equally. This would not be possible with an objectivist or post-structural ontology or epistemology. For the objectivist, the respectful listening the participants described as part of the SEOS would be folly—why give credence to a subjective view of a phenomenon when the road to knowledge goes through careful observation from outside the event? But participants were “Completely Caught Up” in each other’s stories and lived through the re-tellings. For the post-structuralist, seeing participants’ stories as something other than performative, situated utterances would be folly. For the post-structuralist, there is no window into the meanings phenomena hold for people—there are issues of power regarding who can say what and when (e.g., Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Neither objectivist nor post-structuralist could bracket successfully in order to value, contemplate, and appreciate the perspectives and experiences of others in the way participants in EPP expressed. To these participants, experience and how humans endow it with meaning through sharing mattered.

Having discussed the thematic structure of the SEOS, in the following section I will extend from the theme discussion into the influences and limitations of the study theoretically and practically. I begin by describing some of the major influences on the SEOS.

Influences and Limitations

In this section I discuss the influences and limitations of the findings. I describe the influences on the course and the SEOS, students whose experience was less consonant with the thematic structure, and other limitations on my study's implications. First, I turn to the idea of *resonance* (Piantanida & Garman, 2009) in terms of attributes of the course and of its instructor.

A common question in qualitative research is related to generalizing the findings. In Chapter 1, I spoke of the importance of resonance, the idea that readers may find plausibility and insight when reading a research report. This study may be inspiring to other instructors, researchers, or students, but the gestalt experience of these participants included many factors that are difficult to mimic. The students of EPP experienced the course as “Different” from other courses they had taken in many ways (Sohn et al., 2016).

As noted in Chapters 1 and 3, the course was an elective, and rare for a graduate course, attracted many different majors, with 13 different programs of study between the 21 students. It is unlikely participants had been with students of so many different majors in their other graduate courses. Such diversity is most often found in general education courses for undergraduates. Aside from the age of the students, another major difference is that general education courses are required.

The topic of the course, existential phenomenology, related to human concerns of a fundamental nature like time, body, world, and others. While graduate students in physics would likely consider a course on quantum mechanics to be fundamental, the concerns of the EPP course were related to personal experience as opposed to abstract theories. Many phenomenologists claim their field is a-theoretical (e.g., van Manen, 2014). This focus on the lived experience may be a concern for resonance. Yet like any other course, EPP could have been taught in a way that separates the knowers from the known. Palmer (2007) points out the prevalent tendency of instructors to encourage their students to learn the facts, rather than think about them (p. 38). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010) says,

The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. (ix)

With this in mind, even highly theoretical knowledge, in order to be known in a transformative way, should be taught in a way that highlights the connections between lived experience and content. And part of that experience is the experience of other students in the course.

It was not possible to pinpoint in certain cases what specific ideas spurred student experience of other students. Often, a “discussion” or “conversation” about a topic was the only reference to other students. The discussion could have had multiple participants including the instructor. For example, in a quote from Blake about struggling to remain authentic and successful, the “discussion” he references included ten total students and the instructor.

The instructor was experienced, having taught the course 28 times (and having read some of the materials at least that many times). He also had devoted some of his scholarship within psychology to the topic of learning and grades, and had written explicitly on the topic of grades (Milton, Pollio, & Eison, 1986; Pollio, 1982; Pollio & Beck, 2000). So despite having no background in educational psychology, learning was an academic concern of his.

The instructor also had a clear focus on ontology and epistemology in his planning (Franklin, 2013), and his students experienced changes that pointed towards becoming phenomenologists. As reported in Franklin (2013), themes of the instructor's planning included "But I'm a Phenomenologist!" and "What Can They Experience in Class?" (p. 167). The former, his ontology, reflects the instructor's being in the world—his understanding of the nature of reality. It is one of who he is, a phenomenologist. With Merleau-Ponty as his basis, his phenomenology was one of intentionality, figure and ground, non-dualism, and wonder in the face of the world. Intentionality refers to the ontological position that consciousness is always consciousness of *something*, it does not exist in a vacuum (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). This speaks to non-dualism, in that the object of consciousness and the perceiver of the object are in constant interaction.

The latter theme shows his emphasis on participants *doing* phenomenology. In the course this manifested in activities examining visual aids like Necker cubes and engaging in transcript interpretation. The instructor "wanted his students to examine and know the world through first-person experiences and inquiries" (Franklin, 2013, p. 168). As Franklin says, "Consciously or unexamined, instructional decisions made during instructional planning or during teaching are

logical outcomes of the instructor's foundational beliefs" (p. 60), and in this course, the participants experienced changes in SEOS that reflected the instructor's intentionality. But not all participants experienced what is represented in the thematic structure.

The purpose of the thematic structure is to present broad experiential patterns in the data (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). But with the data available for this case study, it was possible to highlight exceptions and idiosyncrasies in class sessions and participants' experiences. The seventh class session had the largest amount of SEOS data and the fewest number of professor-directed activities. Many of the studies I reviewed in Chapter 2 advocated for activities that encourage student interaction for participation and learning (Fassinger, 1995; Ní Raghallaigh & Cunniffe, 2013; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Taylor (2007) refers to them as "the most powerful tools to foster transformative learning" because they "provid[e] students with learning experiences that are direct, personally engaging and stimulate reflection upon experience" (p. 182). The results of this study confirm the importance of such activities, since participation and involvement were high. But this study adds a clearer picture of the changes learners experienced throughout the course.

The few students who did not report the entire thematic structure (Meg and Ben experienced the figural themes but did not report anything related to the ground, Meg, Kelly, and Stephen did not report experience of all the subthemes) were not "bad" students, and by the definitions shared by the participants in Galanes and Carmack (2013), they were "good" students. Perhaps, according to Belenky and her colleagues (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Belenky et al., 1986), Meg and Ben would be considered "Separate Knowers" since they had such little

SEOS. They also rarely mentioned the instructor, but when they did mention an idea for applying course content to their work or personal life, the idea's origin was often from him or the readings. The ways of knowing Belenky et al. describe emerged from non-phenomenological interviews in which directive questions were asked about epistemology and ontology. Had the PEER group asked Ben or Meg specifically what helped them learn in the course, there may have been data allowing for classification of their learning approaches.

There were five participants that did not report the subtheme of "Changes in Being," and these five: Ingrid, Ben, Meg, Steven, and Kelly, were among the bottom third of participants in SEOS word count. Three of them, Ingrid, Steven, and Meg, missed at least 5 of the 15 class sessions. They were "All Together in This Space" less frequently than the other 18 members of the class. Yet all of these participants reported transformative learning (N. Greenberg et al., 2015), and all of them "Saw Variations." There are few valid assumptions to be made about these five participants except that they documented fewer experiences involving their classmates.

This study neither establishes nor implies causality in terms of strong relationships and transformative learning. Meg and Ben engaged in transformative learning despite reflecting on the class in ways that largely ignored their peers. But as with many other studies of transformative learning (Taylor, 2007), the student experience of other students included the development of trust, openness, "connected knowing," and transformative learning, and for the most part, the students who had the most SEOS data (George, Kari Ann, James, Lois, Lisa, Barbara) seemed to change and learn the most. In the next section I discuss the significance of the findings and present recommendations.

Significance and Recommendations

One of the goals of this dissertation is to add to the body of transformative learning theory, classroom climate literature, and philosophy of education. In this section I relate what I have learned in this study to those three fields. My focus in transformative learning will be on the theoretical significance of the progression I saw in the student experience of other students. I then present a classroom climate framework for instructors (Sohn, 2016) that guides my recommendations.

Insights for transformative learning.

This study provides insights for transformative learning theory through its careful examination of the experience students have of other students in a course with years of anecdotal evidence of being described as life changing. The class-by-class data coupled with focus groups and individual interviews allowed for a longitudinal look at how transformative learning occurred over time through the SEOS.

Transformative learning has been defined in different ways (for more discussion see Chapter 2). There is Mezirow's (2009) idea that "problematic frames of reference" become more "permeable" through critical self-reflection and rational discourse. Dirkx's (2001) focus is on a Jungian concept of "soul work." Cranton (2006) focuses on authenticity, and Willis (2012) focuses on changes in "being and becoming," an existential, rather than cognitive, perspective. It is Willis' definition, along with N. Greenberg et al.'s (2015) concept of "realizing course content" in the lives of students, that are most appropriate for the participants in this study.

Willis specifically describes the roles that others can play in transformative learning in a more practicable way than Mezirow, Dirkx, and Cranton. For Willis, individuals are in tension with others—we need others for support, but that support can be limiting. He discusses the importance of “invitation” as an encouragement for students to come to the “party” of his classroom. His goal is to “engage the learning in friendly, interpersonal exchanges that respect the learner while encouraging her or him to take up specific learning agendas, because in this way the learner can be enriched” (p. 223). The participants of the EPP course saw each other as “Invested” and “Genuine”—they accepted the implicit invitation of each other to be respectful and friendly.

But respectfulness and friendliness were not the words used by participants. They spoke of openness, “Investment,” “Responsibility,” connection, safety, and trust. It is this kind of atmosphere that is key to what Taylor (2007) says is necessary to foster transformative learning: “It is through trustful relationships that allow individuals to have questioning discussions, share information openly and achieve mutual and consensual understanding” (p. 179). But to call what participants shared with each other “information” is overly technical. Participants shared experiences together and shared experiences from their pasts. Taylor’s description does not capture the existential import participants placed on the kinds of sharing and mutual understanding achieved in the EPP course through SEOS. But what was achieved took time, and the most significant finding for transformative learning from this study is the learning progression I interpreted from the longitudinal data.

For some participants, there was enough data to identify qualities of “Connected Knowers” (Belenky et al., 1986), such as the ability to suspend judgment while attempting to understand another person’s perspective. For example, Phil worked to empathize with points of view he had strong emotional reactions to in regard to the 9/11 attacks. Belenky and Stanton (2000) reviewed the findings of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986). They created a semi-hierarchical typology of learners and describe their work as a road map for transformative learning. Belenky and her colleagues claim the typology of learners can serve as markers on a developmental path, but it does not show transitions between the different types, and types do not necessarily represent phases. Typologies are often used to categorize or label learners rather than identify where they are on a trajectory: one *is* a “Silenced Knower” or a “Subjective Knower.” In this study I did not attempt to create a typology, but I do chart a progression with the “Coming to Appreciate Variations” theme. Through adopting and adapting to the classroom climate they co-constructed, participants engaged in experience with each other to learn in a transformative way.

They progressed together in an environment free of the coercive elements of grades to connect the perspectives their classmates shared to who their classmates were as people. Phenomenology added a powerful framework for the next step—variations must be equalized. In learning the course content, participants were participating in a key element of transformative learning: egalitarianism. Participants next realized course content in their lives. In the culminating phase of transformative learning, two thirds of course participants expressed “Changes in Being” through SEOS. This “culmination” is temporary—it does not represent an

ending point. But with a road map of transformative learning, the people involved on the road with participants are only “All Together in This Space” for a certain period of time. It is with the intent of supporting the progression of “Coming to Appreciate Variations” that I present the following framework for recommendations to foster transformative learning.

The Space and Place Classroom Climate Framework.

In this section I share recommendations for classroom climate using evidence from my study of SEOS and normative arguments about what should be done in higher education in the face of problems outlined in Chapter 1 like shallow student engagement. In Chapter 1, I discussed the possibility that instructors are not solely responsible for the creation of a classroom climate, but even in the delimited data of this study, students made connections between their experience of others and the instructor’s design. If students speak frequently in a course, they influence the classroom climate. So while many of the recommendations from this study could be directed at students, the audience of this dissertation is unlikely to include them. An outgrowth of this document could be a manuscript directed at students. I begin this section by describing the Space and Place Classroom Climate Framework (SPCCF) and then explain in turn its elements. Those include the following areas of recommendation for instructors: provide structure, design for openness, create connections, and provide autonomy and freedom.

The SPCCF (Sohn, 2016) was developed during the research for Chapter 2 and refined based on the findings in Sohn et al. (2016) and Chapter 4. Its basis is in Tuan’s (1977) thesis that space is freedom and place is security (p. 3). The idea is that classroom climates must provide safety and comfort but also the possibility for freedom, risk, and discomfort. Students need

structures that are supportive and open in order to be able to “Invest,” get “Completely Caught Up,” and “Come to Appreciate Variations.” Instructors should modify elements of their course design and structure but also work relationally with students to achieve appropriate levels of “space” and “place” in their classrooms. I share the SPCCF in Table 6, below, with recommendations (in bold) and related elements of the EPP course described within the SEOS (in italics). This framework can guide instructors in the development of courses that may lead to transformative learning (N. Greenberg, et al., 2015) and the kinds of democratic learning environments (Greene, 1988; Thayer-Bacon, 2008) discussed by some participants.

Provide structure. Instructors should provide structure to course elements to eliminate uncertainties among students that distract from learning. The instructor of the EPP course eliminated the uncertainty around grading procedures—everyone received an A. Other instructors may be limited to *reduce*, rather than eliminate, grade uncertainty. Simplifying grading procedures, as recommended in Milton, Pollio, and Eison (1986) is one possibility. They suggested criterion-referenced grades of “no credit,” “credit,” and, rarely, “honors.” Yet in the EPP course, participants associated the lack of competition and focus on learning to having “the question of grades *resolved* pretty early” (Barbara, focus group 1, emphasis added), which was at least one influence on the grounding theme, “All Together in This Space.”

Instructors should also include specific kinds of activities in their planning in order to provide structure. The instructor of EPP spent his time planning many activities and would choose which to include based on what was happening during the class session. While there was much openness to the progression of the activities, they were planned with learning objectives in

Table 6. The Space and Place Classroom Climate Framework

General Goals	Place: Safety and Comfort	Space: Freedom, Risk, and Discomfort
Course Elements	<u>Provide Structure</u> • Reduce uncertainty regarding grades. • Design activities that require students work together to “Invest” and “Get Hands Dirty” to discover course content. • Provide (challenging) artifacts to which students can respond. <i>The issue of grades is resolved early.</i> <i>Activities: artifact discussions, practicing phenomenology, discovery learning.</i> <i>Instructor gives discussions a starting point.</i>	<u>Design for Openness</u> • Provide material that allows for “Diversity” and “Variations” to be shared by course participants. • Give time for activities and discussions to allow for “Investment.” • Share authority. • Allow students to appropriate and modify course goals. <i>Expansive discussions.</i> <i>Intimate explorations.</i> <i>Student contributions illustrate content.</i> <i>Student ideas “Spill Out.”</i> <i>Difficult readings.</i>
Person Elements	<u>Create Connections</u> • Use and allow humor, personal stories, and confirmation. • Unite students with a common existential project. • Share identities. <i>“All Together in This Space.”</i> <i>“Genuineness.”</i> <i>Validation, solidarity, and connection.</i>	<u>Provide Autonomy and Freedom</u> • Allow students to change who they are. • Share responsibility for learning. • Have disagreements. <i>Free for “Changes in Being.”</i> <i>“It’s all good.”</i> <i>Personal disclosures.</i> <i>Taking “Responsibility.”</i>

mind and the intent to “launch the world” of the learners through demonstrations, activities, practicing phenomenological methods, and engaging in phenomenological research (Franklin, 2013). These activities were frequently referenced in the SEOS across the thematic structure and provided opportunities for students to “Invest” and “Get Hands Dirty.” As Lois said, the instructor gave students “a starting point,” (individual interview), and they took it from there. For students to go from “a starting point” to transformative learning, the materials provided must be challenging. So in addition to structure, there must be openness.

Design for openness. Instructors should design activities that are open and challenging in such a way that students are able to share their perspectives, thoughts, and stories, thus allowing for students to see each other’s “Diversity” and “Variations.” Participants in EPP took on difficult readings and “Got Hands Dirty” in their exploration of course content, indicating they took risks in learning.

“Getting Hands Dirty” and “Investment” takes time, and instructors should provide it. EPP students saw each other as invested and “Genuine,” which involved doing additional work beyond that assigned or sharing relevant personal examples. Participants noted the “expansive discussions” (Lois, post-class reflection, Class 4) and felt “an intimacy” (Sonia, post-class reflection, Class 7), and such activities, where student contributions illustrate course content in emotionally engaging ways, cannot be accomplished quickly.

Instructors should *share authority* (Thayer-Bacon, 2008). In many ways, the instructor of EPP fulfilled the typical role of a professor. He delivered mini-lectures, determined the readings, designed the syllabus, and planned class activities. From the field notes, one can see that he

spoke the most frequently. But he also “gave rein” (Sonia, individual interview) to student interests and stories. Instructors should diffuse their authority in such a way that students feel they have free reign to explore content and appropriate course goals for their own purposes. The practitioner-heavy group of students in EPP had many ideas that “Spilled Out” into practices they could adopt in their lives and work. Designing for openness will not be as successful as it could be if the instructor does not also create connections.

Create connections. Instructors should create connections among students so that personal support can come from any member of the class. The use of humor, personal stories, and confirmation can help students feel a sense of validation from each other and be perceived as signs of “Genuineness.” Honesty is an important quality of safe classrooms (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Students can experience each other “All Together in This Space,” if they are united in solidarity with a common existential project.

In the EPP course, the common existential project was to “expose the heart of the matter” (Lois, post-class reflection, Class 1) and understand and apply phenomenology to improve personal practice and academic research, “the art of being better” (professor participant observer, post-class reflection, Class 1). Greene (1973) suggests teachers use art to provoke and inspire students to reexamine what they have taken for granted in their lives. For art “requires a different stance on the part of the beholder” (p. 293) than the everyday stance, the natural attitude. The instructor of EPP used art and demonstrations. The discussions that accompanied such artifacts often stood out to participants, but the ground, the context for such discussions, was “All

Together in This Space.” The mutual examination of visual phenomena during the first class sessions required “a different stance,” and students took the different stance together.

Using art or artifacts, going on field trips, and having experiences together are all situations in which it is possible for the instructor and students to be *doing* something together. These kinds of experiences can be used to highlight in-group similarities, thus activating Haidt’s (2012) “hive switch.” In the EPP course, participants also engaged in practice research interviews. These were considered intimate, in part due to the types of questions asked. Students were allowed to not only *do* something together, that particular set of activities encouraged disclosure and immediacy, constructs shown to have a strong positive effect on participation (Rocca, 2010) and student-student connectedness (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010).

As an instructor of pre-service teachers, I unite my students with the goal of transitioning from students to professionals. I highlight a change in being-in-the-world I want for them—to go from asking, “What do I have to do in this course?” to, “How can I use this course to help me achieve my goals for my future career?” (adapted from Piantanida & Garman, 2009). By and large, my students are all going to be teachers, and this gives them the opportunity for a *shared identity* (Thayer-Bacon, 2008, see below for discussion). But tightly knit communities can stifle individuals by constraining them with social expectations, so creating connections must be balanced by providing for individual autonomy and freedom.

Provide autonomy and freedom. Instructors should provide autonomy and freedom to allow for “Changes in Being.” Greene (1973) emphasizes the importance of having expectations that students are in a process of becoming. Rigid expectations that students may be “smart” or

“always talk” can limit their growth. The instructor of EPP never put down or rejected a student idea. Phil noted explicitly that “everyone participates/speaks in this class” (post-class reflection, Class 7). Rather than a “consolidation of responsibility” (Karp & Yoels, 1976), there were *shared responsibilities* (Thayer-Bacon, 2008), a point I return to below. A few participants did consistently speak more than others, as noted in Chapter 4, but only in three class sessions did participation dip below 90%, and only in one class session did it dip below 85%. Lisa, in her individual interview, said, “You can put an idea out there and...get muddy and it’s, it’s ok. It’s good. It’s all good.” The freedom and openness participants expressed about the course generally (Sohn et al., 2016) were associated with SEOS as well, as was the instructor’s acceptance of student comments that seemed to be non-sequiturs. Without his intentional design of the course it is unlikely they would have come away from the course describing it as democratic education.

Thayer-Bacon (2008) describes three key themes of a theory for democratic education: shared responsibilities, shared identities, and shared authority. She was inspired by immersion in schools that were embedded in what she called collective cultures: they were in some ways removed from the mainstream influence of the liberal democratic tradition and its focus on individualist pursuit of academic success. She came away from her time in the field with the *sharing* framework as a guide to education for democracy. The sharing features were evident from observations of the EPP course and also stood out to participants. If the goal of instructors is to transform their students’ ways of being-in-the-world, shared responsibilities, shared identities, and shared authority must be a part of the design of the course.

Sharing can help achieve the vision Greene (1988) presents for freedom in education:

The aim is to find (or create) an authentic public space, that is, one in which diverse human beings can appear before one another as, to quote Hannah Arendt, “the best they know how to be.” Such a space requires the provision of opportunities for the articulation of multiple perspectives in multiple idioms, out of which something common can be brought into being...In contexts of this kind, open contexts where persons attend to another with interest, regard, and care, there is a place for the appearance of freedom, the achievement of freedom by people in search of themselves. (p. xi)

And if instructors follow the preceding recommendations, the likelihood of producing a classroom climate that fosters transformative learning will increase. But a question remains as to what is the appropriate balance of safety and risk for different instructors and students. To address this and other questions, I have suggestions for future research.

Future Research

From this research I see many paths for future studies. This study contributes to the understanding of how students experience each other in a course that could be described as learner centered (Blumberg, 2009) and one in which the instructor used a phenomenological pedagogy (Franklin, 2013; Franklin et al., 2014). Participants experienced transformative learning (Sohn et al., 2016). Considering the elements of the course that were salient to these participants, I could design a survey instrument based on the SPCCF to gather student and instructor perceptions on the “appropriate” balance between space and place for various courses. With my understanding of the importance of other students in a course, time inside and outside

the classroom (or online forum in the case of an online course), and the importance of student connection, such a survey could lend much to the improvement of transformative learning outcomes in higher education. In light of the recommendations of Johansson and Felten (2014), the goal would be to see if open learning opportunities, time for reflection, and the integration of action into the curriculum leads to the realization of course content into the lives of students. Such research could also answer some of the major remaining questions regarding fostering transformative learning put forth by Taylor (2007) in regard to intimacy and responsibilities of the learners.

Another topic of interest to me is understanding the experiences of EPP course participants in their current lives. Is phenomenological seeing still a part of their ontology? Do they still listen to the people around them, including friends, family, clients, patients, and students, in a way that honors the first-person perspective? A follow-up to the work of the PEER group would be to find former course participants and ask them what stands out to them in their lives as practitioners who took EPP during graduate school. This could provide important information regarding the durability of transformative learning and the integration of phenomenological ontology and epistemology into the practice of teachers, nurses, counselors, and others.

In my future work with students, I could expand this study by replicating the data collection procedures used in the case study of EPP. Since I teach undergraduates, it would be interesting to know how their experience differs. If the research on participation is any

indication, since more students speak in class in upper level courses, it is possible results would be similar in my senior-level seminar.

Another question I am intrigued by in this case study is the importance of grades and assignments. Was the guarantee of an A key in the gestalt of participant experience? Because of my delimitations, I did not include statements like the following related to grades and the instructor's course design: Kari Ann felt "torn" about not having a final project. She was "thrilled to not have that added stress at the end of the semester, but at the same time...doing those projects is what...forces things to come together." She "want[ed] to get something out of this [course]...to have something to show for it" (individual interview). For her, the practical skills she gained in phenomenological interviewing sufficed as a takeaway. George was also torn on grading. He wanted feedback and felt that was one of the professional obligations of the instructor. His idea was the instructor could write a paragraph for each student, indicating what each student gave to the course. But he also said he did not need such feedback. These statements show that for some participants, the question of grades may not have been resolved, and they lacked a sense of completion.

Considering the inability and disinterest in trying to isolate a "variable" in phenomenology, the research design to investigate grading may take a more creative turn than comparing a similar phenomenological case study in a course where grades were based on assignments and exams. The best route may be to find participants who had participated in courses with various grading procedures and prompt them, "Tell me about a grade you received that stands out to you."

In my future work with instructors, I hope to implement action research studies that examine the use of the SPCCF (Sohn, 2016). I want to know what the experience of using such a framework is like for instructors and if they find it valuable.

Final Thoughts

I am concerned that an instrumentalist approach that sees college as a checklist to fill out for a degree robs universities of their potential to guide students towards a greater integration into their world (Johansson & Felten, 2014). In each field of study there is potential to speak to a part of the soul of the learner that the dominant culture ignores (Palmer, 2007), and I want my practice as an instructor to promote the discovery of these unknown worlds that may be right under my students' noses.

In this dissertation I began with my experience as a learner and instructor. I experienced changes in the way I taught and lived my life through participation in the EPP course. In my own teaching, I noticed the potential students have to impact the classroom climate when they invest their effort and are genuine. These experiences, along with my involvement in the PEER group, led to my inquiry into the student experience of other students. Because of the anecdotal reports that the EPP course was life changing, I delved into transformative learning theory and philosophy of education. Willis (2012) is among those who favor an existential approach to transformative learning theory, and Greene (1988) names freedom as the goal of the existential approach in any educational domain. The thematic structure of the SEOS shows what teaching and learning for freedom can look like.

If students are to realize course content in their lives in a way that gives them a sense of its aesthetic truth (N. Greenberg et al., 2015) over the course of a single semester, they must in some way have to “grapple” (Lisa, individual interview) with the content, but not be so challenged that they drop the course. Tuan (1977) noted that the first place a human experiences is the mother’s lap. In that place there is a nurturing relationship, safety, comfort, and belonging. The safety of intimate relationships with others creates the possibility for the beginnings of autonomy in the form of identity (Thayer-Bacon, 1997). In EPP, the participants turned the classroom into their place to be “all together.” The course was a refuge, a “happy time” (Kari Ann, individual interview), and a place to “come in and relax” (Thomas, focus group 2). The course was a world apart in which participants brought in their experiences of the world and from which their experiences “Spilled Out.”

This was an atmosphere in which students went beyond passive learning, stepped outside the checklist mentality, engaged in a common pursuit of becoming better, and lived the freedom of envisioning different futures for their selves and their professional fields. They did so together, and their experiences of each other were profound and transformative.

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Appendices

Appendix A

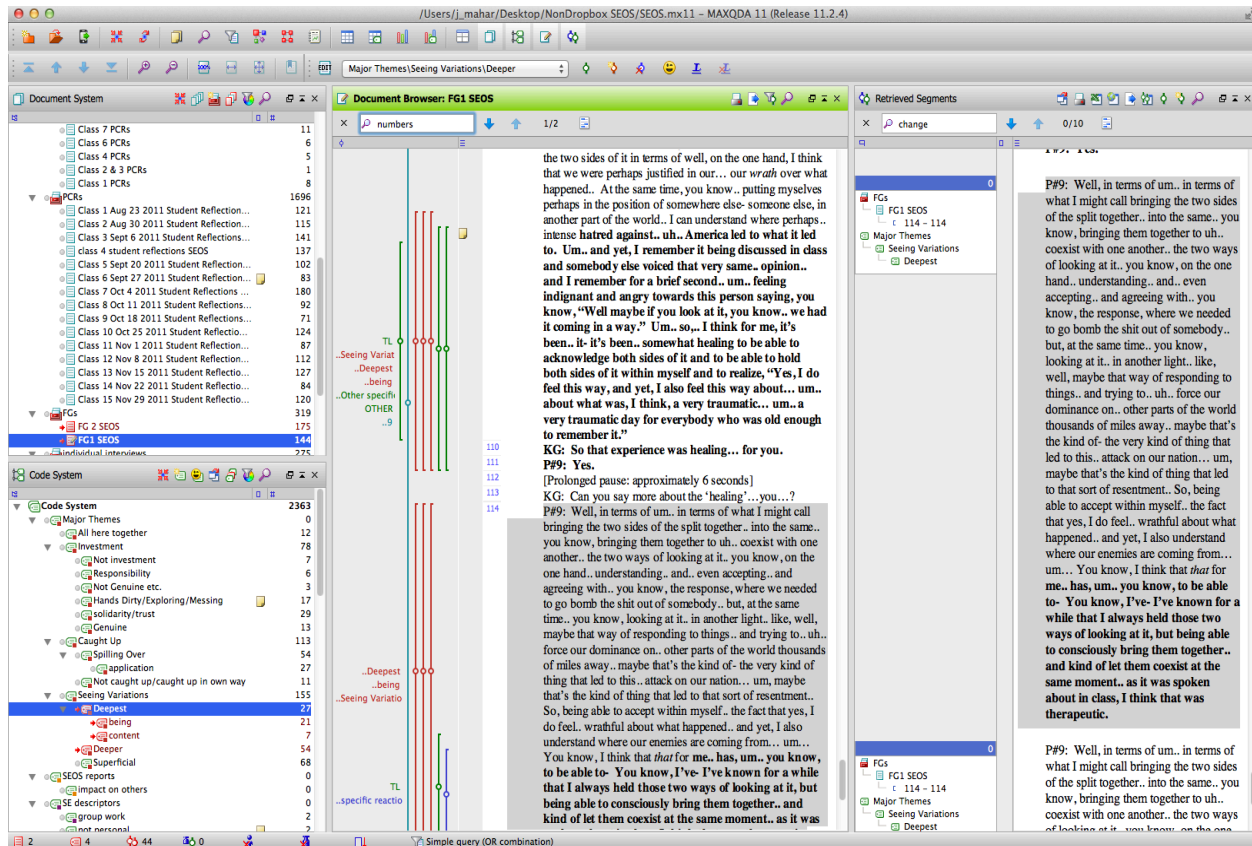
In vivo codes	Secondary codes	Imaginative variation (as documented in memos and notes from the interpretive research group)	Proposed theme
“The size of the class and diversity of interests.” (Mark) “The diversity of the students in experiences and interest.” (Whitney) “There is a wide variety of people in the course.” (Blake)	“Variety” “General” “Diversity”	Participants are aware of differences on day one, the day introductions were done. Also they are aware of similarities: Blake said, “they are as human as I am.” Some participants used the term diversity. Diversity for me means race and ethnicity, but no one mentioned race or ethnicity, first class session or otherwise. However, age and disciplinary background was mentioned, along with “diversity of interests” (Mark). The diversity of interest could have been a reference to the many different research interests mentioned during the first class session. An awareness of difference brings to mind social comparison and identity: students identified with other students—George said he appreciated that James brought up his faith (class session 1 audio), yet two students, Brian and Thomas, remarked on the mention of religion in ways that separated them from George and James in terms of faith.	“Coming to Appreciate Variations” Seeing variations was the experience of learning through others’ perspectives, stories, and “variations.” It began with more superficial perceptions of difference and progressed towards a deep understanding of perception and intentionality.
“In our group, different members had very different interpretation of certain passages. Seemed related to individual interests	“Variety” “General” “Diversity” “Deeper”	Class 4, group work related to questions about qualitative research by Fischer. Phil gives what to him is a plausible explanation for differences. This attribution to interest and background is going a little deeper with seeing variations	

and backgrounds.” (Phil)		than simply noting them. He is connecting who people are to how they interpret a passage.	
“I liked hearing so many interpretations of the poem. I had a sense of trying each one on (like a hat) to see if I can relate this particular view point to my own experiences. I especially like it that I can accept completely opposite point of view as being true. I have experienced both points of view. So, I see no conflict. And a-ha! I am seeing ‘variations’!” (Barbara)	“Variety” “Activity” “Specific reaction” “Diversity” “Deeper” “Seeing Variations”	Class 7, reading a poem by Strand, “Keeping Things Whole.” Here Barbara poetically provides the theme name and describes how she sees from the other perspective and “tries it on.” Lisa remarked on the same activity that she could see the different interpretations of the poem in a similar way to how the Rubin figure (the vases and faces illusion) pops back and forth between what is figure and what is ground. Barbara’s quote marks around variations likely refer to Idhe’s (1986) description of Husserl’s imaginative variation, in which variations are equalized in order to find the essence of the phenomenon. Her a-ha moment is an expression of progress towards seeing phenomenologically: “seeing variations.” Kelly, too, remarked on this, but there is a difference: Kelly says one cannot agree with all the perspectives at the same time.	
“I think I really enjoy...the awareness...of self, the awareness of others’ perspectives and...I think just getting a new perspective to you positionality within the world and you own world and how it relates to other people. And so, just		Focus group 1. Here Whitney shows the full extent of seeing variations: she sees differences and similarities, turns her attention inward, sees how her perspectives are related to her positionality, her background and experience, and then reflects on her “being” and finds it therapeutic. For Whitney, variations are something that help her engage in self-reflection on her being, a critical element of transformative learning. She refers	

tying in that awareness, you know, with all the different backgrounds we've had and different experiences. It's just been really interesting. And I think that makes, at least in my own experience, has made me really reflective and, um, kind of analytical on my own sort of being, which I think is nice. And it's healthy, to appreciate that. It's almost like therapy.” (Whitney)		to seeing variations as something that is healthy: new perspectives, different backgrounds, different experiences are held up like a mirror for her. Her culmination, which is different than what Whitney said, is one of a change in being. There is not an explicit reference to course material. Whitney experienced a change in being, an existential kind of transformative learning like those discussed in Willis (2012). Here she attributes that change to seeing variations, in other locations she specifically thanks the instructor for shaping her life as a person, student, and professor. In class session 10 she attributes a “release from a ‘road map’ that is regulated by society’s judgment” to a class conversation on the topic of time. Whitney was not the only one that related her experience as being a therapeutic one (see quote from George below). George, Sonia, Phil, Lois, Lisa, and Kari Ann all mentioned that class was like therapy.	
“Yeah, this is something I hadn't really thought about this class until it was just mentioned, but um the diversity that we have in this class is a rare sort. You know, not only- not only in terms of our different disciplines and academic	“Variety” “General” “Diversity” “Seeing Variations” “Changes in Being” “Coming to Appreciate Variations”	The language of appreciate is different from the language of “seeing.” Seeing is visual, and seeing variations does not capture the full extent of egalitarianism captured in Barbara’s statement here and others like it in the individual interviews and focus groups. It points to the “Changes in Being” indicated in many participants’ SEOS data. Diversity changes to variation when students learned to appreciate the	

backgrounds, but uh you know, we have a wide variety or- um, a wide variety of ages, um, all sorts of different- I don't know, it seems as if we have a pretty diverse range of just personal philosophical standpoints and uh, religious standpoints and so forth and I have- I have really come to appreciate it because in all of the other classes I'm taking, um, you know everybody's a clinical psychology student, so it's like everybody kind of comes to the class with very similar perspectives on things..." (Barbara)		perspectives of other students— from personal and disciplinary standpoints.	
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Appendix B



This is a screen capture from MAXQDA. The screen is split between three columns. In the column on the left, the viewer can see the documents in the upper left and the codes in the lower left frames. The central frame is the document from which the retrieved codes in the right-hand column come. The ability to look at the context of a retrieved quote helps maintain the sense of the parts to the whole.

Vita

Brian Kelleher Sohn was born and raised in Eastern Kentucky by parents Mark and Kathy Sohn, both college professors. He graduated from Pikeville High School in 1997. From there he pursued a bachelors degree in physics at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colorado, graduating in 2001. After some time working as a substitute teacher, he traveled around South America until the fall of 2004. He moved home to Kentucky to teach at the David School, a high school in David, Kentucky. Here he began his Master of Arts in Teaching degree at Morehead State University. He taught at Belfry High School for five years before moving to Knoxville, Tennessee to begin his PhD at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2011. While in the Learning Environments and Educational Studies, an interdisciplinary program including educational psychology, cultural studies, and instructional technology, he taught a seminar in educational psychology to teacher education students. Upon acceptance of this dissertation, Brian will have earned the title, Doctor of Philosophy in Education.