

Postcards from Prison: An Auto-phenomenological Inquiry

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Background

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I decided to draw a series of small postcards of the places I have visited or lived that have made me feel happy, safe or free (see selected images one and two below). This exercise was a part of a journey to understand how my identity has been shaped by places and spaces. After I completed these drawings and reflected on what they meant to me, I began to imagine what my life would have been like without these places, to see if they would mean more to me if I thought of them as “out of reach”. With this notion in mind, I took a thick black marker and drew ‘prison bars’ over all of the images I had created. This emergent heuristic inquiry (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990) involving the following six steps: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and culmination in creative synthesis, made me feel as though I was distanced from the feelings of elation and joy that these places normally illicit. I was surprised that it felt difficult to cover over my pictures but that this became easier to do. By the time I finished this exercise, my black lines were much thicker and the positive images more distorted.



Image #1: “On a mountain”



Image #2: “In a forest”

Upon further reflection, I unexpectedly linked the creation of these postcards to how I have felt at times, the need to distance myself from things that have happened during my experiences as a student, teacher, parent and University professor. I grew concerned that for the first time I could see how I have disengaged from particular school-based experiences in order to continue to function within other educational systems. Thus, when thinking about presenting my autobiographical curricular explorations in this paper, I decided to use the central autobiographical memory related to my journey into teaching, as a postcard sent from prison. Choosing to focus on what led me to my first professional experience as an educator is important to the focus of this paper because of its relationship to the work I do now with pre-service teachers who are framing their own teacher identities in the University classroom. Throughout this article I refer to my pedagogical and curricular aim of designing and implementing my pre-service teacher education courses as lived, co-constructed, emergent experiences. Until recently, a part of this intention has meant that I start my classes with the story of how/why I became a teacher and the importance of this decision to me. What I have begun to notice about this particular narrative is that I tell it in the same way each time. Thus, this article is partially a provocation of my unexamined reasons for using this story, its impact on me and on my students.

Using the postcard from prison as a framework and conceptualization to anchor this work was a choice that is in no way meant to trivialize the experiences of those who have been or are behind bars, or the work being done in relation to empowering incarcerated populations (Conrad, 2012 & 2015; Hartnett, 2011; McGrew, 2008). As previously mentioned, the notion of imagining myself in prison in order to think about the significance of places and spaces that are significant to me, was a construct that grew out of a heuristic inquiry. To further situate this notion, I will now turn to information on the postcard.

Introduction and Rationale

In Latin, the prefix “post-“ means *after* and is used to denote the way in which something takes place after or in addition to something that has previously taken place (i.e. P.S. comes from post-scriptum and indicates that additional writing has taken place “after” the writer signs their letter). “Card” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary takes its roots from the Old Italian *carta*, meaning literally leaf of paper. Nowadays, cards are most often thought of as decorated pieces of paper with greetings on them, or as hard laminated pieces of plastic with certain kinds of information. Postcards in particular, emerged as a form of correspondence in the late 1800’s as a novel way for people to communicate (Smithsonian Archives, 2015). Varying from decade to decade and country to country, postcards in North America now most often include an image or

landmark that is important to a particular place, with space for an address, a short message and a stamp on the opposite side.

In *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* by Derrida (1987), three key articles (or postcards) are used to explore his understanding of psychoanalysis and its relation to institutions. This is done while calling to attention, according to scholars such as John Phillips (2007), the way to understand how the *post* as a *turn around* is a signifier reminding us that it can never come logically or chronologically first but that for Derrida, the secondariness of the post will always be implicated as soon as there is anything at all. In order to further discuss how the postcard is used as a theoretical anchor for understanding autophenomenology later in this paper, and as a concept for presenting autobiographical narrative, a discussion of autobiography, phenomenology, autophenomenology and the postcards will now be presented.

Autobiography and Currere

The original purpose of this paper was to write a series of postcards from prison that corresponded to each of the five postcards I drew, in order to deepen understandings of parts of my autobiography related to becoming a teacher. This was meant to be an exercise in understanding the curricular tool of *currere*. In general terms, *currere* has been defined in the field of curriculum studies as the lived experiences students and teachers have when engaged in learning. Understanding *currere* in this way was first proposed by Pinar (1974) and then later discussed as a method for systematic educational self-study by Pinar and Grumet (1976). This method has four steps: regressive, progressive, analytical and syncretical. In the regressive step one's past lived experiences are considered the "data," which (is) generated through "free association"—a psychoanalytic technique—to revisit the past and thereby re-experience and reframe one's memory. In the progressive step one looks at what is not yet and imagines possible futures (Kumar, 2011). In the analytical stage one examines the past and the future and creates a subjective space of freedom in the present. The present, the past, and the future are looked at as one movement. In the fourth, the syncretical moment, one revisits the "lived present" and asks: What is the meaning of the present? (Kumar, 2011).

Engaging in the process of *currere* is meant to help an individual address a significant and personal educational moment by dynamically and psychoanalytically looking at it in order to understand the roots of the chosen issue. It is thought that by following this method, one can deepen their agency "...because autobiography is concerned with reconstructing self and cultivating singularity, which is politically progressive and psychologically self-affirmative" (Pinar in Kumar, 2011, p.10).

Phenomenology

Once I began the process of selecting key educational moments to explore using the *currere* method and placing them alongside the postcards I drew, I discovered that presenting the postcards one after another as stand alone vignettes of my curricular inquiry did not achieve the outcome(s) I anticipated. This challenge emerged because although I was trying to discuss educational moments in detail, I realized that I was still presenting them from my own point of view and that I could not take the concerns I was addressing and make them applicable and accessible for a larger educational audience. Thus, although I felt personal self-affirmation, I felt the need to further question, analyze and theorize the significance of not only selected autobiographical moments, but also how I had perceived the experiences themselves.

The emergent focus of the inquiry thus became how to question my own questions and moments of resonances using grounding phenomenological questioning as discussed by Magrini (2014). Phenomenology (Cerbone, 2006; Heidegger, 1962; 1972; Husserl, 1965; Kant, 1965; Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Moustakas, 1994; Sartre, 1992) is a discipline that focuses on the study of how consciousness relates to first-person experiences. Trying to understand why I had selected the moments I chose for the postcards, and why I perceived them in the way that I did, in order to develop understandings that would have an impact for pre-service teachers, led me to return to Husserl's descriptions of the structures of consciousness, followed by existential critiques of this position. According to Polkinghorne (1983) Husserl developed the phenomenological method "...as a means to gain knowledge of invariant structures of consciousness... (that were) focused on pure consciousness, as experientially given (so that) in the realm of consciousness various objects are constituted" (p.203). Two basic approaches to the study of human experience (i.e. free variation and intentional analysis) were then proposed. In free variation, a description of essential structures is given; and in intentional analysis, concrete experiences and how the experience has been constructed are the focus. Once these approaches take place the results are viewed as "data" and this data is then analyzed and descriptively explained. The separation of consciousness and empirical facts were distinct categories for Husserl in this approach. However, in *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger argued that the existential separation between consciousness and the world should not exist and rather, being-in-the world should supplant consciousness as a category for human understandings of phenomenon. This view was extended by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1964) to emphasize the relationship between structures of experience and the human experience.

These three understandings for approaching phenomenology: 1) consciousness and external experiences are separated; 2) living in the world is seen as being in the world where consciousness and phenomenon are intertwined; and 3) the relationship between structures and experience in an embodied sense are essential to understanding being and phenomenon were still just a start for me. Thus, I turned further to the work of Dennett (1992) and his suggestion that hetero- (i.e. other) phenomenology needs to be a category for understanding consciousness. This made me question why educational phenomenologists conflate the hetero- and auto- (i.e. self) aspects of phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990, 2002, 2014). This means that rather than making a distinction between "going back to the things themselves" in order to "see something as if for the first time" (two of the basic principles of phenomenological work) a particular educational moment is often explored without accounting for one's subjectivity or the level of consciousness that one has around the impact of an embodied experience.

Thus in order to see a moment "as if for the first time", an individual must understand the moment from a personal perspective (embodied or not) before bracketing this subjective self (the phenomenological reduction) in order to then bring both moments together and see the moment/thing without preconceptions/biases etc. Despite the critiques that have emerged, where for example in bridled phenomenology it is argued that one's subjectivity can never be removed or set aside from oneself, I propose to attempt to separate the auto- (self) and hetero- (other) aspects of phenomenology. I propose that examining a key autobiographical experience (my journey into teaching in the first postcard) using *currere* will create an opening that allows for the bracketing of the subjective self (considered through and in the second postcard). Then by trying to understand both narratives as one movement of being, I ask: *If autophenomenological inquiry, explored through the postcard presented in this paper can help me to bracket my subjective self in order to experience being an epistemic subject, then what are the implications*

of this method for fostering the development of teacher identity?

Context in pre-service teacher education

The reason for seeking to do this work is that a great deal of educational research focuses on reinventing the school (Montessori, 2013), or changing the content of the curriculum (Bobbitt, 1918; Noddings, 2007; Tyler, 1949). The underlying problem with this is that more attention is needed to reconceptualize the role of “teacher” (Schrag, 2008). A teacher is conventionally conceived of as someone who delivers pre-prescribed content (Apple, 1995; Pinar, 2004). Yet, in our rapidly changing and interconnected world, creativity, imagination and adaptation are increasingly important skills for teachers to be able to develop in their students (Craft, 2002). This means that new teaching models and conceptions of what it could mean to be a “teacher” in the 21st century are needed (Kilbane & Milman, 2014). But, in the current climate of declining educational resources and support, tighter controls, intensified workload, increased accountability, curriculum prescription and standardization (Ball, 1994; Hargreaves, 2000), pedagogical innovation rarely occurs (Keller-Mathers & Murdock, 1999).

However, there are two integral aspects of many existing Canadian pre-service teacher education programs that provide an opportunity to explore new ideas of what “teacher” could mean. These components include *developing a reflective practitioner* who engages in lifelong learning (Schon, 1983) and fostering the *construction of a teacher identity* that withstands subjectification (Carter, 2015; 2014a&b). In this context, being able to weather subjectification means being able to create a teacher identity that is personal, authentic and not contingent upon someone else’s ideal view of what a teacher is or should be. The problem with this approach in practice is that the events, places and people observed and reflected upon by pre-service teachers on practica are contextualized within their existing perspectives. This means that rather than challenging perceptions and values around schooling and teaching; the traditional observation-reflection model often reinforces the current norms of the educational system and ideas about teachers.

This work requires risk, creative engagement, contemplation and time. It means moving beyond the familiar mind-body paradigm into the realm of emotions, the imagination and even *being* (Kohl, 1994; Naess, 2002; Osho, 2004; Palmer, 2007). The reason for the focus on *being* can be understood through Maxine Greene’s (1995) idea of “wide-awakeness”. Greene contends that for positive societal change to occur through the arts and education, we must all become aware of the external and internal forces that weigh upon us. This focus anticipates the inward turn reflected in the works of curriculum theorists such as Aoki (2005); MacDonald (1995) and Miller (2004) that have resulted in the push for pre-service teachers to move beyond their own nostalgic educational experiences in order to reinvent themselves as teachers (Mitchell & Weber, 1999).

Thus, this paper seeks to illustrate how *currere* and phenomenological processes as applied to two autobiographical moments (contextualized as postcards) might evoke the inward turn emphasized above in order to foster reflexivity and pedagogical change. When writing the postcards from prison, I drew on my own experiences visiting a prison in Guatemala, Central America as well as from a pension that I almost stayed at in Guatemala City when I was a volunteer teacher in the country in 2001- 2002. The pension was in the most dangerous part of the city and in the basement of a run down building. There were no windows, low ceilings and cement walls with curtains instead of bedroom doors. Since it was below ground, the dampness never left the air. Since it was Guatemala, the lights kept going off and on. Each mattress was

completely red from crusted blood and the woolen blankets flea-ridden. Unfortunately, the group I was with had arrived late at night upon recommendation from another teacher, who said it was close to the bus station we needed to go to in the morning, and that it was the cheapest place available.

In line with the images one and two included in this article, I thought that by thinking about writing my autobiography while in this imagined prison that I would be partially giving myself permission to luxuriate in deepening my descriptions of events as they happened, because I would have a significant amount of time to do so in this scenario. The two postcards presented discuss: 1) the narrative of my journey into teaching that I have been sharing for the last fourteen years, and 2) the description of an event that I have never spoken about previously. These two narratives were selected because of the tensions that they bring forward for me personally, as well as because they emphasize the tensions in the experience of turning phenomenology onto the self.

Postcard: My journey into teaching

It was August 2001 and I was acting in Shakespeare by the Sea's production of 12th Night as Feste (the fool) after graduating that spring from Dalhousie University's acting program in Halifax, NS. The first three years of my Conservatory style actor training were spent in dance, acting, voice, singing, theatre history and Feldenkrais classes wearing a black leotard and essentially finding myself. This experience provided the opportunity for me to confront and then subsequently let go of the baggage that had collected in my life prior to this time. As an approach to developing actors, this process of learning to let go was designed to help one learn to live in the moment and be in a place/space which allowed one to respond both on and off stage to moments encountered with openness and vulnerability.

Being offered an acting job immediately after graduation made my plans to move with other close actor friends to Toronto, ON and to start our lives in the theatre make sense. However, two weeks before my show wrapped up and my move was to take place, I received a call from an international school in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala asking if I was still interested in volunteer teaching for the upcoming school year. This was a position that I had actually applied for on a whim one afternoon while searching at the library for apartments in Toronto. I don't think that I ever actually imagined that when my finger pressed send on the online application that there was really a school out there. But, my first experience as an 11 year old girl listening to a woman named Karen Ridd speak about being imprisoned in Guatemala during the civil war in the 1980's must still have been somewhere in the back of my mind.

What impacted me about her experience in this country was how she described her presence as a white Canadian woman who could not speak the Mayan language of the villagers with whom she was staying. She recounted, that by sleeping in the same household as certain targeted Indigenous families during the war, the soldiers who came to disappear the men and boys of these communities, would be swayed from their course and leave the village. This stayed with me: the girl who people called her father's shadow; the girl who wore "Save the whale's t-shirts" and attended "For jobs justice and equality: Stop free trade protests" before she was aware of having a political identity; the girl who cried throughout elementary school when the school principal or teachers asked her questions in class because she was simply terrified to speak.

This girl was awestruck by the idea that simply being and not having to say a word to make a difference in a country so far away meant something.

It was as if it was inevitable that I go to Guatemala and yet, I had never spent any time researching its history, geography, culture or politics, and so, knowing nothing of the country, school, Spanish or indigenous languages, I did what I was trained as an actor to do, I said yes! In the two weeks before my show ended, I had sold all of my worldly belongings to pay for a plane ticket to Guatemala and announced the plans to my family and friends.

I have always spoken of my year in Guatemala living with a family and volunteer teaching in a fairy-tale, dream-like and somewhat romanticized way. It is simple for me to begin once more describing how I loved the people in this country and their beautiful language which was so musical to me; the landscape of rolling mountains, volcanoes, lakes, oceans and 'eternal spring'; the life that pulsed through everything and infected me so that I fell in love with all I saw and experienced as I gave everything I had to share with my students and those I met throughout my travels. In return I experienced more than I thought I gave in the form of a generous human spirit that was staggeringly miraculous despite the situations, which most people lived in.

I remember walking to the school I worked at as the sun rose and meeting other teachers along the way. We would sometimes stop for freshly squeezed orange juice and marvel at the large loads the women carried on their heads. A fresh, hot cup of incredible coffee would meet me each morning in the staff lounge and I would walk outside from the main office to my classroom perched on a mountain near the clouds. Each day I would greet the little plant my students had given me and open the windows to my class. These were just some of the simple rituals that warmed my heart and brought a smile to the inside of my face.

Thinking back on this time, the story I have told and retold is about the joy my students had for learning. The excitement they had for getting to learn. How this seemingly utopic experience was so different from what I later experienced as the reality of teaching in Canada during an era of standardization. And so I continued. Year after year, my story of teaching in Guatemala became more and more beautiful. More vibrant and compelling as the actual experience slowly grew more and more distant.

Understanding my journey into teaching

The above narrative about my journey into teaching is an example of the regressive step of *currere*. As mentioned this past experience is considered data, and generated through free association. Re-experiencing my journey into teaching, rather than a specific moment teaching in the class room, is significant because it is in a way the first representation of freedom to act of my own accord that I exercised after graduation. Of course, prior to volunteering as a teacher in Guatemala I had went away to University, travelled a bit and lived on my own. However, in line with the second step of *currere*, to “reframe” this moment, I can contend that it was the act of breaking away from the path that others thought I was going to take (i.e. to move to Toronto, Ontario and become the actor that I was studying to be) and instead to “follow what I believed to be my calling” by going to Guatemala. This moment became the moment of connection in which I risked and felt as though I was giving up “everything” to listen to the faint call pushing me to

become who I was meant to be. This decision was simultaneously the most difficult and most freeing thing I had done in my young life.

If I consider the progressive step of *currere* and try to see how this journey into teaching was perhaps marked from the onset as unimaginable, everything else that happened as a result becomes a part of this filtered dream-like perception. Imagining possible futures, as a result of this moment, is in many ways what I have been doing ever since I returned from Guatemala, considering that I am the first (and only) person on my mothers side of the family to have attended and graduated from University.

My “Guatemala story” has been a memory that I have felt defines and legitimizes my place in education. Upon reflection, I feel good about it because I volunteered for a year there and saw myself in a new way as a result. Someone who could make an impact positively on the lives of others, someone who was willing to explore and take risks and try new things. And so up until this last year I have always begun my pre- and in- service teacher education courses with this adventure. It was not until after I read about phenomenology and started to question the picture of my time in Guatemala, that I have constructed and perpetuated for so long, that I also began to notice that the students in my classes were only sharing their positive experiences about themselves as teachers. Had they somehow learnt as I had that focusing on the positive moments in educational environments helped one to feel like they were doing something right? That they could handle whatever came up on their own and that if they couldn’t teaching wasn’t the profession for them? My well-loved journey into teaching story began to feel incomplete and I began to see the limitations of *currere* as a psychoanalytic tool for helping me to affect change and provide pedagogical support in my classrooms. The synthetical step called me to ask and reflect: “What is the meaning of the present?” But, not “And now what?” What was the purpose of reflection if real change in action was not a part of the process of this undertaking?

Perhaps the real reason that I imagined writing my autobiographical reflections from “a cold, damp and dark prison” is that I experienced an abduction attempt one night while walking home after playing cards with a fellow teacher when in Central America 14 years ago. When I was living in Quetzaltenango there were reports from the American Consulate, who also met with the Canadians from abroad living in the city, to tell us of things to be aware of. The last report I had heard described the rise in the number of gringo woman being kidnapped, raped and left in the mountains.

Postcard: The story I never told

I can still remember the sound of the tires stopping on the dirt road minutes from my temporary home...can see the barbed wire on the top of the cement house with a flickering light that was to my right, but still too far away from the unrolled window on the passenger side of the white van, as a man grabbed me and started pulling me inside....I remember thinking that if he got me in above my waist that the other man would be able to grab my hands and I wouldn't be able to fight....I remember screaming and kicking for my life and thinking that there were no stars in the sky that night. I remember them laughing as I ran and ran and ran in the opposite direction of my house, in fear that they would follow, my lungs burning for oxygen, not knowing where to go on that eternally dark night.

At the time I did not allow myself to think about what might have happened to me if I hadn't escaped this situation so that I could cope with continuing to live in the community I was a volunteer teacher in at the time. A place I had called home for eight months while living with a Guatemalan family. A place I loved so much that I was seriously considering living there for the rest of my life. I didn't even tell my Guatemalan mother Lily what had happened. I just went straight to my room when I snuck back home after I was sure I hadn't been followed and waited for the sun to rise the next morning. The next day I got up. Got dressed. Washed my face and walked to school. I taught my classes like it was just another day

But I never went out to play cards again at night.

And I started screaming when I heard the sound of a car screech to a stop behind me.

And when I started this writing, I couldn't stop thinking about this moment and what could have happened. Especially since this was the transformative teaching experience that changed the direction of my life. The experience that consequently led me to pursue teaching. I thought that if I changed the story of joy for falling in love with the country, my students, the school I taught at, and myself as a teacher by remembering this trauma that I would forget about the beauty of my memories.

That, just like the dark bars I placed over my favorite pictures became easier to draw, I would forget about what made me fall in love with teaching and the power of education to change the world. That if I changed the "perfect" start to my journey into teaching, I wouldn't have positive memories to draw on when things are tough.

But, I was almost abducted.

I was almost a statistic.

I could easily have been one of the bodies left for dead on the side of a road or locked away in a cold, dark room somewhere.

Understanding that which can't make sense

The focus of the story in the second postcard strongly emerged for me in the Fall of 2014 when a local news story covered the account of several women stepping forward to talk about assaults or near assaults that they had experienced years prior. When this occurred, my own "forgotten" memory bubbled up. This was an emotional time for me. As a way to begin dealing and talking about this experience, I read Pema Chodron's *Living beautifully with uncertainty and change* (2013). In this book there is an exercise that not only speaks about dwelling with difficult moments in order to feel them fully (even if they bring up emotional or physical pain). This exercise suggests breathing in all of the hurt and pain of everyone suffering and then exhaling peace and relief. This is done instead of using the breath to take in positive images and thoughts and exhale negative ones. If as Jean Luc Nancy (2000) writes in *Being singular-plural*, we are all being(s)-with and that I is not prior to we, then not seeing my pain as a singular, embodied phenomenon but, rather as a universal one, may help to disrupt the narcissistic, ego-driven

consumer culture that surrounds and impinges upon us daily (because the pain and its absence become relational and connected in-community-with).

While doing this work (in addition to a regular yoga and meditation practice), by the time I started writing about the almost-abduction, I didn't feel as though I had to be so personally entwined with the narrative. Only speaking for myself, this process had a grounding affect, rather than the alienating one that I experienced when drawing prison bars over the images of my favorite places (previously described). Instead of asking: "What is the meaning of the present?" as a result of this narrative, phenomenology asks one to leave any grounding questions, bracket ones subjectivity and leap (satz) to see things as they are, as if for the first time.

But what does that mean? How can you bring yourself to a moment where you see "as if for the first time" what the mid-day sun looks like on the curve of a leaf? What is this notion of *being as wide-awakeness* that gets so forgotten because of the busy-ness of being human? And so, for me, questions of time and space and what it might mean to be in prison re-emerge. Prison... a place where I perceive time to be constructed differently as a result of ones confinement in space... Like the room where I write. Where I sometimes feel chained to my chair for fear of not living up to expectations in the environments I now dwell in... But it is here in these moments that I can also forget myself and become something that is a *presence before being* because sometimes my thoughts flow before I can consciously contemplate them. A prayer as Pinar and MacDonald have termed it. A prayer in presence with the universality of all beings. Here, in this space, I can begin to forget the epistemic self and remove both emotion and embodied fears from my experience to try and see as if for the first time "that" story.

I was in love with someone who didn't love me. I believed that he was the one I would spend eternity with and so I cared more about what I thought would make him happy than what it meant to love and take care of myself. A single young woman living in Guatemala. I knew the streets were dark at night and that it wasn't safe to be out. But I went because I just wanted to be with him. I did so many things that year to become who I thought he wanted me to be. And I mixed this up with thinking that I was making me happy. He didn't walk me home, even though I had said I was scared. I said it was fine because I didn't want him to be tired the next day...but I think the van was following me a long time...maybe it was all a part of a joke...but after I got home and I called him (because I didn't know who else to call)...he still didn't come. So I thought it was best to be silent (no one likes loud women, right?).

Ssssh.

It is easier to become a part of *that silence*.

That silence that permeates the corridors of our schools.

That silence that mummifies the bodies of teachers who are screaming inside...bursting because they don't want to give that test, but need their job...shaking because it is so hard to hold back from hugging that crying child...or swallowing tears because kids and colleagues can say mean things.

That pain that comes from saying the wrong answer in front of everyone when asked a question... or not having the "right" clothes or hairstyle when out on the school yard at recess.

How have we forgotten how *fragile* and *miraculous* we all are?

How?
How...
...how

Is there still time to remember?

There is a violence happening every day.
In our schools, in our society and within ourselves.

In a sense, taking my own experiences and trying to subjectively bracket the “positive” moments I tend to highlight in order to see the reality of the experiences “for what they are” and “not for what I wanted them to be” has helped me to understand and support the experiences of pre-service teachers who I continually observe pushing aside or hiding their negative practicum experiences because they want to show that they can handle things.

Conclusions, Tensions and Turning points

The autophenomenological quest to explore “if the ego is an object transcendent to consciousness... appearing through reflective acts” (Cerbone, 2006, p. 79), using the postcard in this paper, has become an approach for me to try and understand how the I as such is not an object of consciousness (Heidegger, 1972). This, allowing the “I” to be at once both subject and object through “writing into being” my journey into teaching was a way for me to travel into a space where the words open up. Where writing could help me become intact and not just in the idealized way that I clung to for all of these years. In this space, “the meaning of lapse or duration in time as well as distance... carries the meaning of temporal and physical expanse as well as the time spent in experience” (Van Manen, 2002, p.3). Using both the autobiographical method of *currere* and the phenomenological reduction or epoche, where one aims to bracket their subjective self in order to see a phenomenon “as it is”, I uncovered a traumatic experience that I buried for many years. But, then through Pema Chodron’s writings on “becoming pain” (2013) I was able to dwell with the fear, pain and sadness until it just left in combination with writing about this moment. I was then able to bracket the self and see it differently by thinking about it phenomenologically. This reflexive, autophenomenological process helped me to go one step further and change my pedagogical practice with pre- and in-service teachers by bringing in all of my educational and life experiences to the classroom, and not just the ones I thought presented a particular image of myself in the classroom. This does not mean that I emotionally indulge myself and “over-share” personal stories with my students (or encourage them to do this in my classes). Rather, I am more open to articulating in a professional environment and manner, relevant pedagogical moments as exemplars to possibly learn from.

Autophenomenological reflexivity and Pre-service teacher education

As alluded to several times in this paper, I continually reflect on how my understandings about curriculum and the way that I live said understandings affect the way I teach in pre- and in-

service teacher educational contexts. Part of the impetus to push myself to re-look at the story about my journey into teaching that I share with my students on the first day of class, is because of my growing concern for the hesitancy my students exhibit when asked to share some of their own educational experiences. Students seem to want to show themselves, one another and me that they can manage in the classroom environment. That they can be in control as teachers and that it is “my job” to give them additional tools to ensure their ongoing success. When I suggest that “our” classroom is a place to co-construct our learning together and to take risks that may lead us into unknown places and spaces, there is resistance. In my “Curriculum and instruction in drama education” class in particular, I ask them to delve deeply into a difficult educational moment and write about it using the monologue as a form for understanding. This optional work is later presented and possibly reframed. It has proven to not only be cathartic for students, but it also helps to create connections between students in way(s) that other curricular contexts and assignments cannot.

Through this pre-service teacher education monologue work, I have synthesized my understandings about using an autobiographical moment and the phenomenological reduction as the rationale for the monologue assignment. This works because once students create their monologue on an educational issue they eventually have to bracket their personal connection to the experience in order to perform it as a stand-alone piece of art that can be shared with others for critique. Students must move their personal moment, that has often been a negative experience that they have hid, to be viewed as an aspect of their experiences, and not a defining one that has to hold them back. Sharing the new emergent understandings that come from the autophenomenological inquiry in the teacher education context I have described, allows a community of learners to experience a deeper and larger picture of what it means for themselves and others to become a teacher (rather than just a “snapshot” meant for a postcard).

Exploring my journey into teaching has been an unexpected and deep provocation for me. I began this article with the intention of adding several short autobiographical reflections to my illustrated postcards from prison as an exercise in *currere*. I ended up, looking into my journey into teaching and uncovering a traumatic experience that forced me to question my perceptions of my experiences and turn to phenomenological theory to make sense of my memories. Connecting my reflexive experience to my work with pre-service teachers further extended this personal understanding. Finally, in the Spring of 2015, the opportunity to return to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, to do some research at the school I volunteered at in 2001-2 came up. Returning to the city, school and other places that had become more like memories than “living, vibrant, moments” helped me to see how not only I, but the country had also changed and grown. This “post-postcard” visit was the final step for me to personally feel as though I could reclaim my impressions of some of the places, spaces, people and country that I love.

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