

# ***Phenomenology and networked learning - a found chord***

***Mike Johnson***

*School of Healthcare Sciences, Cardiff University, johnsonmr@cardiff.ac.uk*

***Felicity Healey-Benson***

*University of Wales Trinity Saint David, felicity.healey-benson@uwtsd.ac.uk*

***Catherine Adams***

*Faculty of Education, University of Alberta caadams@ualberta.ca*

***Nina Bonderup Dohn***

*Department of Design and Communication, University of Southern Denmark, nina@sdu.dk;*

***Greta Goetz***

*English Department, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, greta.goetz@fil.bg.ac.rs;*

*gretzuni@protonmail.com*

## **Introduction**

Phenomenology has captured the imagination of researchers since Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) began to use the term. Examples of phenomenology within the networked learning conference proceedings are notable yet few, as examined by Healey-Benson (2020) and Johnson (2020) in the 12th Networked Learning Conference, and who then went on to form <https://hanfod.NL>. The goal to ‘engage the networked learning community in discussing the suitability of choosing phenomenology as a research methodology’ (Oberg and Bell 2012, p209) had been demonstrated by Dohn (2006) and continued by Adams (2014).

If a broader interpretation of ‘the phenomenological’ were taken, many more authors could be listed, who have borrowed ideas from phenomenology or adopted approaches which have done that. For example, phenomenography (e.g. Cutajar and Zenios, 2012), that maps qualitatively different ways that phenomena are experienced, appears regularly at the conference. However, Marton (1981) distinguished phenomenography from phenomenology, e.g. taking first or second-order perspectives. We also recognise that some scholars may not acknowledge our own papers as even ‘phenomenological’. For them, phenomenology may require circumscription by philosophical methods, the preserve of mainstream philosophy conferences, even as such conferences are broadening their audience, e.g. the British Society for Phenomenology. Our approach is more inclusive, consistent with the conference’s values, seeking to enrich and diversify research in networked learning while upholding its scholarly values and commitments. The symposium therefore contains, expands and explains philosophy, and features work with more applied aims, which draw inspiration from phenomenology and demonstrate harmony with both its essence and power to strengthen networked learning research in many ways and across diverse themes. For example, Adams, Groten and Yin confront issues within informal networked learning in an age-group rarely treated at the conference: pre-schoolers’ development considering their exposure to artificial intelligence-enabled technologies.

A unifying approach to phenomenological literature shared by the symposium papers is the way that phenomenological philosophers have served as ‘insight cultivators’, whether in the figure of van Manen (2016), or one of phenomenology’s canonical writers (e.g. Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre,

Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, Stiegler). We challenge the Networked Learning Conference to recognise and engage with phenomenology as ‘wonder in the face of the world’ (Fink in Merleau-Ponty, 2012). We further urge delegates’ attention to phenomenology’s alignment with the Freirean and Networked Learning concerns for how we think about and face the world, regenerating research and practice. With this in mind, the symposium’s final segment reserves a place for communal elaborations on aspects of the contributors’ personal discoveries, taking a cue from van Manen in Lee’s paper, of what it means to reflexively relive phenomenology and networked learning. This will present a live opportunity to reflect on the phenomenological accord shared by the contributors, such as their care about experience in networked learning. All papers address the people/tech nexus, even if the technology, to draw upon Stiegler, is a timeless writing screen. This screen is at once used in research about networked learning, inscribed by the marks and traces that networked learning leaves behind and a warning of forgetfulness that can ensue if we rely on the record to remember for us.

The authors hope to demonstrate how phenomenology shares and reinforces the Networked Learning Conference’s themes, and especially to understand and trouble our taken-for-granted selves vis-à-vis technology. Phenomenology’s obsession with the ordinary everyday belies an acute ethical lens, so that scrutiny of what may be overlooked is instead subject to reflection that draws out lessons of the utmost urgency. Thus, we hope to assert phenomenology as a found, rather than ‘lost chord’, at the Networked Learning Conference, inspiring investigation into our future and what we mean by it.

- Kyungmee Lee: ‘Evocative writing to research lived experiences of networked learning’
- Nina Bonderup Dohn: ‘Investigating the background – taking a Merleau-Pontian phenomenological approach to Networked Learning’
- Felicity Healey-Benson, Mike Johnson, Catherine Adams, & Joni Turville: ‘What is it like for a learner to participate in a Zoom Breakout Room session?’
- Jean du Toit & Gregory Swer: ‘Networked learning in the time of pandemic: Intersubjectivity and alienation’
- Greta Goetz: ‘Re-presencing the digital trace in networked learning design’
- Catherine Adams, Sean Groten & Yin Yin: ‘Tomorrows networked posthumans: Reflections on Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Well-Being of Young Children’
- Final session: Joint reflective session exploring phenomenology and networked learning.

## References

Adams, C., Yin, Y., Madriz, L. F. V., & Mullen, C. S. (2014). Snapshots from the Lived World of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs): A phenomenological study of learning large In S. Bayne, C. Jones, M. de Laat, T. Ryberg, & C. Sinclair, (Eds.), 10th International Conference on Networked Learning 2014 pp. 339–342. Edinburgh University.

Cutajar, M., & Zenios, M. (2012). Variations in students’ experience of networked learning in a post-compulsory pre-university context. In V. Hodgson, C. R. Jones, M. de Laat, D. McConnell, T. Ryberg, & P. Sloep (Eds.), 8th International Conference on Networked Learning 2012 (pp. 41–49). Open University of The Netherlands.

Dohn, N. B. (2006). Affordances – a Merleau-Pontian account. Proceedings of the 5th Networked Learning Conference, Lancaster. In S. Banks, V. Hodgson, C. Jones, B. Kemp, D. McConnell, & C. Smith (Eds.), 5th International Conference on Networked Learning (pp. 1-8). Lancaster University.

Healey-Benson, F. (2020). Reflections & mapping outputs for ‘Navigating the phenomenological and phenomenographic terrain as a doctoral student in a Networked Learning context’—A Round Table Discussion. In S. B. Hansen, J. J. Hansen, N. B. Dohn, M. de Laat, & T. Ryberg (Eds.), Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Networked Learning (pp. 352–370). Aalborg University, Denmark.

Johnson, M. R. (2020). Phenomenology and networked learning: Mobilage glimpsed from the inside through an online focus group. In S. B. Hansen, J. J. Hansen, N. B. Dohn, M. de Laat, & T. Ryberg (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Networked Learning* (pp. 157–163). Aalborg University, Denmark.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. A. Landes, trans.). Routledge.

Oberg, H., & Bell, A. (2012). Exploring phenomenology for researching lived experience in Technology Enhanced Learning. In V. Hodgson, C. R. Jones, M. de Laat, D. McConnell, T. Ryberg, & P. Sloep (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Networked Learning 2012* (pp. 203–210). Open University of The Netherlands.

Van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

FROM:

Proceedings for the Thirteenth International Conference on Networked Learning 2022 Edited by:  
Jaldemark, J., Håkansson Lindqvist, M., Mozelius, P., Öberg, L.M., De Laat, M., Dohn, N.B., Ryberg,  
T. p. 423-424