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# Hermeneutic Phenomenological Interviewing: Going Beyond Semi-Structured Formats to Help Participants Revisit Experience

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### Abstract

Phenomenological research traditionally involves multiple focused interviews that rely on the participants' memories and reflections to revisit experiences. There are many other interview formats that have the potential to support participants in this process by instead engaging with the phenomenon as it presents itself to their consciousness. In this paper, I present an example of how multiple interview formats, including think-aloud, stimulated recall, and semi-structured were used in a hermeneutic phenomenology study exploring expert teachers' perceptions of teaching literacy within their content area to secondary students with learning disabilities. I provide example protocols in which I used multiple interview formats (i.e., think-aloud, stimulated recall, and semi-structured) to help participants engage with the phenomenon in ways that did not rely on memory and reflection alone. I describe how the data collected during different interview formats were analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenological methods. Finally, I highlight one participant's findings, discussing how each interview contributed to the findings, and providing illustrative examples of how going beyond semi-structured formats helped this participant revisit experiences in ways that new meaning emerged and enhanced understanding of the phenomena.

### Keywords

Teachers, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Interviewing

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## Hermeneutic Phenomenological Interviewing: Going Beyond Semi-Structured Formats to Help Participants Revisit Experience

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*Phenomenological research traditionally involves multiple focused interviews that rely on the participants' memories and reflections to revisit experiences. There are many other interview formats that have the potential to support participants in this process by instead engaging with the phenomenon as it presents itself to their consciousness. In this paper, I present an example of how multiple interview formats, including think-aloud, stimulated recall, and semi-structured were used in a hermeneutic phenomenology study exploring expert teachers' perceptions of teaching literacy within their content area to secondary students with learning disabilities. I provide example protocols in which I used multiple interview formats (i.e., think-aloud, stimulated recall, and semi-structured) to help participants engage with the phenomenon in ways that did not rely on memory and reflection alone. I describe how the data collected during different interview formats were analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenological methods. Finally, I highlight one participant's findings, discussing how each interview contributed to the findings, and providing illustrative examples of how going beyond semi-structured formats helped this participant revisit experiences in ways that new meaning emerged and enhanced understanding of the phenomena. Keywords: Teachers, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Interviewing*

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Phenomenological research focuses on the meaning of lived experience, or “the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (van Manen, 2016, p. 9). Phenomenological research aims to explain a phenomenon as it presents itself to the consciousness of the participant, and to return to the “things themselves” as they are initially presented to us (Husserl, 1970/1900). The assumption behind phenomenology is that if we put aside our preconceived understandings of a phenomenon and “revisit” our experiences, new meaning emerges that will enhance our understanding of the phenomenon (Crotty, 1998, p. 78).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is one of three types of Western phenomenology, the other two being transcendental and existential phenomenology (Kafle, 2011). While an essential premise underlying transcendental phenomenology is that we can suspend our personal opinions to reach an understanding of reality, and existential phenomenology posits that one should not be detached from their perspective when exploring phenomena, hermeneutic involves a process in which the researcher and participants work together to explore and develop their understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Koch (1995) states:

Hermeneutics invites its participants into an ongoing conversation...Understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is a dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework, and the sources of information. The implication for hermeneutic inquiry is that research participants are also giving their self-interpreted constructions of their situation. (p. 835)

This co-construction of understanding, or fusion of horizons, occurs through a circle of readings, reflective writing, and interpretation (Gadamer, 1989). This allows researchers to engage participants in a collaborative process of understanding the phenomenon. Not only do the researcher and participant collaborate through conversations during interviews, but they engage in ongoing discussions around reflective writing, modifying based on participants feedback until the interpretation fully encapsulated their lived experiences.

### **Phenomenological Interviewing**

But how do we help participants revisit their experiences? Phenomenological research has traditionally relied on multiple interviews involving open ended questions, often with each interview having a different focus (Beven, 2014). For example, as described by Beven (2014), Seidman's method for interviewing involves three semi-structured interviews per participant: the first focuses on questions about the participants history and context; the second focuses on the participant reconstructing the experience; and the third focuses on the participant reflecting on the meaning of their experience. Within hermeneutic phenomenology methods, van Manen (2016) describes interviewing as having two purposes: (1) as a means to explore and develop a rich understanding of the phenomenon; (2) to develop a conversation around the meaning of experience. Thus, van Manen (2016) encourages more conversational interviewing. While conversational interviewing is often seen a more flexible interview format than structured interviews, van Manen (2016) cautions against using unstructured or open-ended interviewing. Hence, van Manen's conversational interviewing is also semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews rely on the participants' memories and reflections to help participants revisit their experiences (Crotty, 1998), but there are many other interview formats which can potentially help researchers support participants to engage with the phenomenon as it presents itself to their consciousness.

### **Interviewing Expert Teachers**

Researchers studying expert teachers have relied primarily on interview data. One critique of interviews with expert teachers is that it often depends solely on teachers' ability to think about and describe their instruction retrospectively (Lauterbach, 2013). Two interview techniques that support participants in exploring their thinking, without relying on memory alone, are interviews that incorporate think-aloud tasks (e.g., planning a lesson out loud), and stimulated recall activities (e.g., observing video of instruction). Research on think-aloud interviews has demonstrated they provide an accurate source of data regarding participants' thinking, especially when interpreted through a qualitative lens (Charters, 2003). Similar strategies, such as cognitive task analysis, have proven effective with teachers (Feldon, 2007). Simulated recall supports teachers in articulating they're thinking better than those approaches rely on teachers' ability to retroactively recall key moments in their instruction, and simulated recall is an effective approach to studying the thinking of experts (Feldon, 2007).

### **Purpose**

In this paper, I present an example of how multiple interview formats (i.e., think-aloud, stimulated recall, and semi-structured) were used in a hermeneutic phenomenology study exploring expert teachers' perceptions of teaching literacy within their content area to secondary students with learning disabilities. I provide example protocols in which I used multiple interview formats (i.e., think-aloud, stimulated recall, and semi-structured) to help participants engage with the phenomenon in ways that did not rely on memory and reflection

alone. I describe how the data collected during different interview formats were analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenological methods. Finally, I highlight one participant's findings, discussing how each interview contributed to the findings, and providing illustrative examples of how going beyond semi-structured formats helped this participant revisit experiences in ways that new meaning emerged and enhanced understanding of the phenomena.

### **Epistemological Orientation**

The epistemological orientation underlying this study was constructionism. Constructionism posits that meaning is constructed, not discovered (Crotty, 1998). The construction of meaning begins when people consciously interact with objects in the world and meaning develops and is communicated within a social context (Crotty, 1998). Phenomenology looks at the meaning individuals ascribe to phenomenon and proposes that meaning comes from interaction with the phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). The study, from which I highlight one participant's experience, was designed to elicit the meaning expert teachers construct from their interaction with one particular phenomenon, teaching literacy within their content area to secondary students with learning disabilities, and how they communicate meaning within the social context of an interview. Language plays a central role in hermeneutic phenomenology; language is socially constructed (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2001) and is the means by which individuals communicate the meaning they attribute to objects (van Manen, 2016). The interviews all explored teachers' perceptions of their experience in the social context of the school and classroom. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires the researcher to acknowledge the role of history and social influences on the interpretive description of the individual's experience.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

I myself have been diagnosed with dyslexia, like the students taught by the teachers in this study. I faced many of the same difficulties and barriers to success as the students these teachers described throughout their interviews. I sat through classes interested in the information locked away in the texts we read in class. My dyslexia prevented me from not only accessing the information but also from demonstrating my understanding of the content through writing. Teachers were often unable to address my difficulties with literacy-based tasks. In spite of this, I graduated high school, completed a post-secondary degree, and continued into a master's degree program in education. Upon graduation, I took a job in a school teaching middle and high school students with learning disabilities social studies and language arts, similar to the teachers in this study. I constantly struggled to balance students' reading needs while teaching the content, the same struggle I had as a student but now through the lens of a teacher. As a social studies teacher, I worked to integrate my understandings of the students' literacy needs with the goals of the content I was teaching. As a language arts teacher, I always kept in mind the content demands the students had outside of my class. My experiences as a student and teacher played a significant role in my choice to pursue the topic of this study. Thus, I chose an epistemological orientation and method I believed would fully acknowledge this, constructionism and hermeneutic phenomenology.

### **Site of Study**

The site of study was a private school which focused exclusively on teaching children with language-based learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia). The school was located in the suburbs of a large metropolitan city in the northeast United States. The school's mission was to "help

students develop the tools and strategies they need to achieve success in college and life.” The school had a successful track record in achieving these goals: on average, 98% of students attended postsecondary two- and four-year colleges. They did so by using the following strategies: (a) Combine intensive support and high expectations within a college preparatory curriculum; (b) Use proven research-based educational approaches to teach skills across the curriculum; (c) Empower students with technology, and use adaptive tools to meet students’ needs; and (d) Help students to understand how they learn, and help them develop independence and self-advocacy skills. At the time of the study, there was 183 students enrolled in ninth through twelfth grade in the school.

The school used Orton-Gillingham (OG) based interventions: multisensory and phonics-based with an emphasis on rules of the language (Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators, n.d.). Prior to employment, teachers in the school participated in approximately 80 hours of OG training. At the beginning of every school year, teachers attended four days of professional development. Less formal in-service professional development occurred throughout the school year; curriculum developers and researchers consulted with teachers to improve their practice. Many teachers participated in committees, such as the skills committee, dedicated to reading recent research and revising curriculum. The school’s dedication to teacher training was evident in their employment of a full-time teacher-education coordinator.

### **Participants**

While there were three participants in the larger study, I will highlight one teacher’s lived experience for the purpose of this manuscript: Wright. At the time of this study, Wright had been teaching for 31 years; this was his 12<sup>th</sup> year at the school teaching 11<sup>th</sup> grade English. Wright was the head of the English department and was also a mentor to other teachers; he was the teacher other teachers turned to for guidance. He was known for holding high expectations for students. He was deeply respected by former students. For example, in one graduation ceremony a former student thanked Wright for his rigor and high expectations and reflected on his class as the turning point in his development as a scholar.

Wright obtained a bachelor’s degree in English, a master’s degree in creative writing, and a doctorate in English. He also held a teaching certificate in secondary English. In the past year alone, Wright attended 32 hours of professional development in reading, 20 hours of professional development in writing, 20 hours of professional development in English language arts, and 20 hours of professional development in teaching students with disabilities. He also reported that over the past decade he had attended “20 conferences, plus three summer sessions on OG, plus innumerable in-school training programs” in teaching students with disabilities. Furthermore, Wright explained, “I am constantly reading research in the fields of literacy, L[earning] D[isabilities], etc. While these are not “professional development” in the sense of a being a course or presentation, being a PhD, I know how to do my own research. I’ve spent thousands of hours over the past decade developing my own approaches and my own workshops and presenting my own workshops and presentations at regional and national conferences.” Wright was driven to become more knowledgeable about teaching and driven to share his knowledge with others.

### **Using Multiple Interview Formats within Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Van Manen’s method of phenomenology (1984) includes four concurrent procedural activities. These included: (a) Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience; (b) The Existential Investigation; (c) Phenomenological Reflection; and (d) Hermeneutic Phenomenological

Writing. Figure 1 shows the procedural activities and steps engaged in during the data collection, analysis, and writing. Formal data collection occurs during the existential investigation and data analysis primarily during phenomenological reflection and hermeneutic phenomenological writing. Below I describe how I incorporated multiple interview formats during data collection, how I analyzed the data, and how I ensured the trustworthiness of the findings.

Figure 1  
*Model of the Phenomenological Process*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Orienting to the phenomena</li> <li>2. Formulating the phenomenological question</li> <li>3. Explicating assumptions and preunderstandings</li> </ol>   |
| The Existential Investigation             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Exploring the phenomena generating "data"               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Using personal experience</li> <li>4.2 Obtaining experiential descriptions from subjects</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Consulting phenomenological literature</li> </ol>   |
| Phenomenological Reflection               | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Conducting thematic analysis               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6.1 Uncovering thematic aspects</li> <li>6.2 Isolating thematic statements</li> <li>6.3 Composing linguistic transformations</li> </ol> </li> <li>7. Determining essential themes</li> </ol>  |
| Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Reading               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8.1 Attending to the speaking of language</li> <li>8.2 Varying examples</li> </ol> </li> <li>9. Reflective Writing               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9.1 Writing</li> <li>9.2 Reflective Journal</li> <li>9.3 Revising</li> </ol> </li> <li>10. Conferring with Participants</li> </ol> |

## Data Collection

The data collection consisted of five interviews, in three different formats: a semi-structured initial interview, two think-aloud interviews, and two stimulated recall interviews. Detailed descriptions of all three interview formats are below.

**Semi-structured interview.** The semi-structured interview was designed to establish rapport with the teacher, and to explore secondary content areas from teachers' life experiences that could inform their pre-reflective understandings of the phenomenon. I opened the interview with an open-ended question, asking them: "How did you come to teaching X grade, X content, here at your school? Can you describe what past experiences led you here?" I then probed the teachers further about their sources of knowledge. See Appendix A for the Semi-Structured Interview Protocol.

**Think-aloud interviews.** The teachers participated in two think-aloud interviews. In the think-aloud interviews, the teachers described their lesson planning process. During the interviews, I instructed the teachers to say out loud everything they were thinking as they

prepared for their lesson. At the end of the think-aloud, I asked clarifying questions. Going through the motions of lesson planning situated the teachers' knowledge within an authentic task they often engage in and is a part of the teaching process. See Appendix B for the Think-Aloud Interview Protocol

**Stimulated recall interviews.** After each of the think-aloud interviews, I videotaped the lesson the teachers had planned during the think-aloud interview and conducted a follow up stimulated recall interview. Prior to each stimulated recall interview, I reviewed the observation and identified the moments when I saw teachers supporting students' literacy needs. The day after the lesson was videotaped, both the participant and I met for the stimulated recall interview, in which we watched the videotaped observation. I instructed teachers to identify moments in the lesson that demonstrated the provision of instructional support for student literacy needs. I asked the teachers to elaborate on what knowledge they had been drawing upon, and on the source of that knowledge. Furthermore, I asked the participants to explain the rationale behind their choice of practice. I also pointed to the moments in the instruction that I had identified prior to the stimulated recall interview. By asking teachers to reflect on their teaching practice through watching their video, I situated their reflections and perceptions within their particular classroom context so as not to depend on teachers' memory. See Appendix C for the Stimulated Recall Interview Protocol.

## **Data Analysis**

During the final step of the existential investigation, as recommended by van Manen (2016), I consulted phenomenological literature, reading the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1962/1948), Sartre (2001/1943), Husserl (1970/1900), and Heidegger (1962/1927). It was from the writings of Merleau-Ponty and van Manen's (1984) interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's writings, that I would ultimately begin to organize my understanding of experience and perception. Humans perceive their experiences: across time (lived temporality), within space (lived spatiality), physically (lived corporeality), and interpersonally (lived relationality).

After transcribing the interviews, following van Manen's (1984) method of phenomenology, I used these existential themes during phenomenological reflection to guide a line-by-line analysis of the transcripts. I considered how time (lived temporality), space (lived spatiality), physical (lived corporeality), and interpersonal interactions (lived relationality) emerged in the participants' discussion of their experiences. From this analysis, I identified predominant themes in the participants' experience. I then narrowed the themes to those central to answering the research question: How do expert secondary content area teachers conceptualize teaching literacy in their content area to students with learning disabilities? The themes identified as central to the teacher's conceptualizations were: a) Developing Literacy Skills with an Eye Toward the Future; (b) Understanding Students' Learning Disabilities in Content Learning; and (c) Integrating Knowledge of Content and Strategy to Further Students' Learning. I identified statements corresponding to these themes. Next, I reordered and combined the statements into an integrated description of how each individual teacher conceptualized teaching literacy within their content area to secondary students with learning disabilities, connecting the teachers' words with my interpretation of their words, creating a description of the teachers' lived experiences.

Finally, I engaged in hermeneutic phenomenological writing (van Manen, 1984). Hermeneutic phenomenology involves a process of readings, reflective writing, and interpretations (Gadamer, 1989). The circular process of reading, writing, and interpreting continued until the participant and I believed my interpretations had fully encapsulated their lived experience. Upon writing the first draft of the teachers' lived experiences, I returned to



the transcripts, attending to the speaking of language and ensuring I was varying my selection of examples to best represent the participants' experiences. I read the transcripts repeatedly throughout the project to ensure that interpretations were tied to their experiences. Van Manen (2016) emphasized that writing in and of itself leads to reflection. As such, the initial draft of the teachers' lived experiences was written during the analysis phase. Additionally, the use of a reflective journal is one way to engage a hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1962/1927). During the data analysis, I used the reflective journal to brainstorm, write, and revise the interpretation being formed. Furthermore, to reach a fusion of horizons, numerous revisions to the interpretation were made. After forming the initial draft of the Wright's lived experiences during the analysis, I conferred with Wright, sharing his written interpretation. Based on the discussion with Wright, I revised my interpretation of his conceptualizations. Discussions of this nature continued until Wright and I believed my interpretations had fully captured his conceptualizations.

### **Trustworthiness**

In hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers assume their prior knowledge, experiences, and biases cannot be fully bracketed, as the researcher is the primary analytic tool; however, researchers engage in a process of explicating assumptions and preunderstandings (van Manen, 2016). This is similar to a process in qualitative research known as epoché. Epoché entails bracketing prior knowledge, or setting aside theories, hypotheses, measuring instruments, and prior research (Wertz et al., 2011). Epoché is intended to support researchers to set these aside to focus on participants' experiences. Epoché requires engagement in phenomenological reduction, which involves abstaining from focusing on the phenomenon as independent of experience (Wertz et al., 2011). In order to address the concept of epoché in this study, I kept a reflective journal throughout all stages of the data collection and analysis. Throughout the interview process, I recorded thoughts about the phenomenon that were tied to experiences visited during the interviews. Before analyzing the data, I bracketed prior knowledge and conceptions about the phenomenon and recorded these in the journal. Upon reflection on the journal, I identified my own interpretations of the teachers' lived experiences that seemed to reflect prior understanding rather than the transcripts of the interviews, and which seemed not to be tied directly to the experiences discussed in the interviews.

### **Illustrative Example from Findings**

The themes identified as central to the teacher's conceptualizations were: (a) Developing Literacy Skills with an Eye Toward the Future; (b) Understanding Students' Learning Disabilities in Content Learning; and (c) Integrating Knowledge of Content and Strategy to Further Students' Learning. For the purposes of this paper, I will first summarize the three themes, highlighting Wright's lived experience. I will second focus in detail on one theme, integrating knowledge of content and strategy to further students' learning, to provide an illustrative example of how each interview contributed to my understanding of the theme.

### **Summary of Three Themes**

The first theme central to Wright's conceptualization was Developing Literacy Skills with an Eye Toward the Future. Wright focused his instruction on literacy skills that would support students to engage with literature in ways that would be expected of them in college. He based this vision on his experience as both a student of English literature and a college instructor. The second theme was Understanding Students' Learning Disabilities in content

learning. Wright thought understanding how students' skill deficits complicated attempts to learn academic content was the foundation for providing effective instruction to students with learning disabilities. Developing literacy skills was essential for both learning content and being successful in the future. Wright saw an important relationship between the difficulties students with learning disabilities experienced, their ability to tackle literacy tasks, and their development of aptitudes needed for English classes. The final theme was Integrating Knowledge of Content and Strategy to Further Students' Learning. Wright understood it was critical to emphasize literacy skills in his instruction to address students' different needs. He described accommodating students' needs while integrating strategies for teaching content and for improving skills to further students' learning. Each theme was influenced by one another: Wright's instructional decisions (i.e., integrating knowledge of content and strategy to further students learning) were influenced by goals he held for his students' (i.e., developing literacy skills with an eye toward the future) and how he saw students' learning difficulties affecting their goals and ability to learn (i.e., understanding students' learning disabilities in content learning).

### **Integrating Knowledge of Content and Strategy to Further Students' Learning**

Wright understood it was critical to emphasize literacy skills in his instruction to address students' different needs. He described accommodating students' needs while integrating strategies for teaching content and for improving skills to further students' learning. He prioritized literacy skills he taught based on his vision of their students' futures as well as how students' skill deficits interfered with learning content. Wright believed learning literacy skills was vital. In his semi-structured interview, he exclaimed, "You can't teach literature if you're not teaching literacy, right?" He believed knowing students' needs would help him design instruction that would help them to learn demanding content and anticipate difficulties students would experience with that content. Below I provide a summary of Wright's instruction and provide quotes from all three types of interviews to demonstrate how they each provided a different vantage point from which to understand Wright's instruction.

Wright's instruction focused primarily on fluency and comprehension. He used assessments to determine what degree of support students needed and incorporated audio recordings of text into his instruction to provide support to the students. To support students' comprehension of text he used explicit strategies, such as sticky notes to mark essential passages and re-reading difficult text while notating and highlighting passages. Wright modeled how to use strategies, and then provided guided practice. Wright approached writing in much the same way he approached reading, deliberately and explicitly. He used a rubric that reflected his expectations for writing as a way to help students learn how to evaluate their own writing. These rubrics were also designed to reflect the expectations for writing on the SAT. Students' strong performance on the SAT was essential for attending college. Wright also placed equal value on teaching students' literacy skills and enabling them to access content. What was exceptional about Wright's instruction was that he took a proactive stance rather than a reactive stance to students' difficulties. This proactive stance emerged throughout all of his interviews.

In Wright's stimulated recall interview, he talks explicitly about how he anticipates students' difficulties. He explained, "I'm always looking for those places that I can anticipate where things are going to go in a different direction from where I want them to go." Wright drew upon his years of teaching to help him anticipate these difficulties. He explained:

I've been doing this course and this grade level and these novels for so long that I have a really good sense of how I can anticipate those problems. Rather than

just saying they're going to crop up again, I try to figure out a way to jump in there and keep them on the right track.

Rather than just waiting for problems to emerge in the lesson, Wright draws on his experience teaching the text to anticipate the difficulties and circumvent them.

Part of this anticipation began during the planning process. During a think-aloud interview, Wright shared, "I've been [teaching] so long I almost know exactly which thing they're not going to know about or understand." He went further to describe how this affects his preparation for his teaching:

I need to remind myself of where the stopping points are. I need to remember to stop at this point and talk about this point [or] emphasize this particular aspect. I want to bring these key things together for them in a way that they often can't themselves so that they can think about it more richly than they might otherwise because they don't often have those literary chops.

Wright had numerous copies of the text, in which he has previously notated what problems arose in the lesson. He uses those older copies of the text to support his anticipatory planning.

He also explained in the semi-structured interview how he began the year to help him anticipate the types of support students would need to read complex texts, and the types of accommodations he would need to provide. He said:

At the beginning of the year, I have them do a 400-word passage aloud; then I mark it for its errors and get words correct per minute; and then I score it on a scale that measures their phrasing, their intonation, and their evenness or smoothness in which they read and put that all onto a spreadsheet. I have a formula that comes up with what I think is a measure of how fluent they really are. That includes both those quantitative and qualitative dimensions. I check that against their silent reading, because some read quicker silently.

Wright then used this information to determine what degree of support students needed, "I use that information to divide them into three categories: people that probably don't need audio, people who might benefit from it particularly for speed, and people who have to have it—they're not going to make it if they don't use it." Wright then incorporated audio recordings of the text into his instruction to address students' needs. He described this process:

And then I go about teaching and training the whole class how to use audio, and we use it in class every day as a natural part of the reading experience. ...I use the audio to [show] them at the beginning of the year, 'at your reading rate it's going to take you this long to read this novel', and then I show them how to use the variable speed and play it aloud in class. It takes them a while to get used to listening to something that's going faster, and I say, look, if you can do this at one-and-a-half-time speed it's going to [take you 6 hours]. At your reading speed, it's going to take you 12 hours. What would you rather do?

This type of planning helps Wright to "bridge the gap" in skills and "give them access to the texts whether or not they had those skills."

Wright not only anticipated the types of difficulties that would emerge during instruction, he thoughtfully designed his instruction both at the beginning of the year and throughout the year during lesson planning to give specialized support to the students. While

he discusses this specifically in his think-aloud and stimulated recall interviews, you can see how this anticipation affects the larger design of his instruction in his semi-structured interview. This was just a single example, of many, of how all three interviews provide different types of information about Wright's conceptualization of his instruction. In examining how Wright anticipated rather than reacts in his teaching, drawing on the three interviews helped me to develop a more complex understanding of this aspect of his instruction.

### **Limitations**

While this study makes an important contribution to the discussion regarding interviewing in hermeneutic phenomenology, there were some limitations. First, while I only highlighted one participant's findings in this manuscript, the original study included a small number of participants (three) and content areas represented (English language arts and social studies). The inclusion of more participants, from more subject areas, could alter, enhance, or refine the findings of the larger study. Second, as this was a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the purpose and the method used singularly focused on teachers' perceptions. Subsequently, we lack information on the specific difficulties students had beyond what the teachers reported, and our knowledge that they attended a private school for students with language-based learning disabilities. As such, I could not draw more evaluative conclusions about the accuracy of the teachers' perceptions. Finally, while my personal experience as a student with a learning disability and as a teacher of students with learning disabilities might be perceived as a limitation in other methods, hermeneutic phenomenology encourages researchers to use their experience to engage in an ongoing conversation with participants that facilitates obtaining experiential descriptions (van Manen, 2016). While my experience was essential to the conversation between myself and participants, I engaged in epoché to support me in focusing on participants' experiences.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Each of the three types of interviews (semi-structured, think-aloud, and stimulated recall) informed my understanding of Wright's lived experience. New meaning emerged as Wright revisited experiences in different ways, with each interview providing a different vantage point with which to understand each individual theme. Additionally, across the different interview formats, I was able to see how the themes interacted. Without the inclusion of all three interview formats, Wright's lived experience would have appeared much less dynamic. Finally, using multiple interview formats enabled me to accomplish both of the goals van Manen (2016) identifies for hermeneutic phenomenological interviewing.

Each interview provided a different vantage point with which to understand each individual theme. As described thoroughly, in the theme Integrating Knowledge of Content and Strategy to Further Students' Learning, Wright not only anticipated the types of difficulties that would emerge for students during instruction, he thoughtfully designs each lesson and his instruction from the beginning of the year to give specialized support to the students. While he discusses this in general in his think-aloud interview, you can see the larger design of his instruction in his semi-structured interview and how this influences his thinking during his stimulated recall interview.

While I did not examine the other two themes as extensively, we see the same influence of the different interview formats on understanding of the themes. In the theme Developing Literacy Skills with an Eye Toward the Future Wright was able to verbalize in his semi-structured interview the overarching goals for his class, and he provided insight into the historical experiences he drew on. This was further supported in the stimulated recall interview,

where he discussed what prior experiences he drew upon in his lesson. In his think-aloud interview, I was able to see how the things he verbalized in his semi-structure interview manifested in his lesson planning. In the theme Understanding Students' Learning Disabilities in Content Learning Wright's understanding of how students learning disabilities affected their learning within the content emerged clearly during the stimulated recall and think-aloud interviews. In the think-aloud interviews, Wright discussed students' difficulties in more general ways, while the stimulated recall interviews tapped into his understandings of specific students. What was hinted at or implied in the semi-structured interview, that Wright knew the barriers his students would face and what they are able to do given the right support, was corroborated by the comments during the think-aloud and stimulated recall interviews, during which Wright discussed what the types of barriers students face.

Across the different interview formats, I was able to see how the themes interacted. Each theme was influenced by one another: Wright's instructional decisions (i.e., Integrating Knowledge of Content and Strategy to Further Students' Learning) were influenced by goals he held for their students' (i.e., Developing Literacy Skills with an Eye Toward the Future) and how they saw students' learning difficulties affecting their goals and ability to learn (i.e., Understanding Students' Learning Disabilities in Content Learning). This was most notable in Wright's discussion of how he designed instruction. While the think-aloud and stimulated recall interviews helped me understand how Wright thought during the act of preparing for a lesson or in discussing his decision making during a lesson, the semi-structured interview also helped me to understand how Wright prioritizes these skills and strategies based on his plans for his students' futures. For example, in Wright's semi-structured interview, Wright explained that he focuses on helping student learn to use audio because "I try to get them to be able to do the things that we want them to be able to do with literature in college level courses which is...you need to be able to read something of a particular length and difficulty in a certain amount of time. For me that's an adult novel of say 250-300 pages in say two to three weeks," reflecting how he developed students' literacy skills thinking about their future. He also explained that his students "average about 140 to 150 words per minute." This is much slower than needed to get through the text in a reasonable amount of time, reflecting his understanding of how learning disabilities affect students' ability to engage with the content. Without using the three types of interviews, my understanding of how Wright designed his instruction to further students' learning, in this case, may not have informed my understanding of how the themes influenced each other.

While phenomenological research traditionally involves multiple focused interviews that rely on the participants' memories and reflections to revisit experiences, it is evident from Wright's case that there are benefits to going beyond semi-structured formats to help participants revisit experiences. Ultimately, by using multiple interview formats within hermeneutic phenomenology I was able to accomplish both of the goals van Manen (2016) identifies for hermeneutic phenomenological interviewing. First, I developed a richer understanding as demonstrated in the above results. Second, I engaged the participant in a conversation about difference aspects of the experience teaching literacy to students with LD within the context of secondary content classrooms. Like most human experience, teaching involves more than just reflecting, it also involves planning for and engaging in instruction. Human experience is itself multi-dimensional, and phenomenological philosophers posit that humans perceive their experiences across time, within space, physically, and interpersonally (van Manen, 1984). As was demonstrated in Wright's case, different interview formats support participants revisiting experiences in different ways, thus leading to new and enhance meaning.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

As this is a semi-structured interview, I may not ask every specific question below but I will make sure to cover all of the topics.

Say to teacher: “The purpose of this interview to explore your knowledge about teaching, your content, about literacy and about teaching students with disabilities. I also want to explore how your past experiences led you to where you are and influenced what you do in the classroom.”

Begin the interview with the following question: “How did you come to teaching X grade, X content, here at your school? Can you describe what past experiences led you here?”

I will ask the following questions when appropriate, making sure to cover each topic:

1. Content Area
  - a) How would you describe your content area?
  - b) How is your content area structured?
  - c) What does it include?
  
2. Content Area Literacy Instruction
  - a) How do reading and writing fit into your content area?
  - b) Are the texts students read in your content area different from texts in other content areas?
  - c) Do you need any special skills to read a text in your content area versus another content area?
  
3. General Knowledge of Students with Disabilities
  - a) How well are students with disabilities able to perform within your content area?
  - b) What kinds of difficulties do they have?
  - c) How might your content area be harder or easier for students with learning disabilities than other subjects?
  
4. Knowledge of the Teacher’s Specific Students
  - a) How would you describe the students in your classroom?
  - b) What are the needs of your students?
  - c) What goals do you have for your students?

I will close the interview with the following question: “Are there any additional experiences in your life you think have contributed to your knowledge, ideas, or beliefs about teaching students with learning disabilities in your content area?”

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Think-Aloud Interview Protocol**

In the think-aloud interview the teachers will describe their planning process for a specific lesson. During the interview, teachers will be instructed to say out loud everything they are thinking as they plan their lesson.

Say to Teacher: “You should say out loud everything you’re thinking as you plan your lesson. This might seem awkward at first but remember, you’re just putting into words everything already going on in your head whether or not you think it is relevant. Put into words your specific steps as well as your rationale for your decisions. I’ll just ask a couple of questions. Our goal is to collect as much information as possible to help us understand the highly complex process you engage in as you plan.”

I will ask the following clarifying questions when appropriate:

1. What are some important things to consider when you are planning a lesson?
2. Describe any courses, workshops, books, curricula that influence your planning the lesson.
3. What’s the topic/purpose of this lesson? Why/How did you determine the topic of this lesson? By the end of the lesson, what do you want the children to know and do?
4. How is this lesson related to other lessons you will teach during the week? Month?
5. What materials did you use to plan this lesson? What made you decide to use these materials?
6. What activities did you include in this lesson? What made you decide to use these activities?
7. Are there any students that you think will struggle more (or be more successful) than other students? How will you respond to that in the lesson?
8. How will you determine whether your students have been successful with this lesson?



## APPENDIX C

### Stimulated Recall Interview Protocol

Ahead of this interview, I will review the observation, and identify moments in which I see teachers incorporating literacy activities/instruction, and supporting students' needs, both in literacy and learning the content. For example, in the observation a teacher may include a mini lesson on paragraph writing at the beginning of a lesson, using a graphic organizer. I will make note of this, in preparation for the interview.

A stimulated recall interview, in which both the researcher and participant watch the videotaped observation, will take place the following day. In the stimulated recall interview, teachers will identify moments in which they incorporated literacy instruction, or their instruction demonstrated support for student literacy needs, and/or in learning the content (such as the above example). They will be asked to elaborate on what knowledge they drew upon, and the source of that knowledge (e.g., "Where did you learn about using graphic organizers for paragraph writing?"). I will prompt the participant to explain the rationale behind their choice of practice (e.g., "I noticed that you did X. Tell me about that."). I may also point to moments in the instruction, and ask questions, such as "Why did you include X? How does X support students' learning? How does X connect to the content you were teaching?"

Say to Teacher: "We are going to watch the video of your lesson. I am interested in understanding your knowledge and thinking about you content, literacy, and supporting students' literacy learning and needs while supporting their learning of the content. Stop the video at points in which you incorporated literacy activities/instruction and/or demonstrated support of the students' needs, both in literacy and learning the content."

After we have completed the video, I will ask the teachers a few follow up questions:

1. What did you think about the lesson? What were the high points? What aspects of the lesson were not as satisfying to you?
2. In your planning interview, you said the goal of this lesson was for students to \_\_\_\_\_. Do you think this lesson successfully helped them achieve this goal? How do you know they achieved the goal? What evidence did you use? OR What made you believe the students did not achieve your goal?
3. What would you do to improve the lesson if you have the opportunity to teach it again? Why would you make these changes?
4. What information did you gain from this lesson that will be useful in planning future lessons? Do you have any specific ideas for what you might do next time?

### **Author Note**

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