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Lost in the lifeworld: Technology help seeking and giving on diverse, post-secondary campuses

Perdu dans le monde vécu: solliciter et fournir une aide technologique dans les institutions postsecondaires marquées par la diversité

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Abstract

Information and communications technology (ICT) is integrated throughout a student's lived experience in their post-secondary learning environment. In order for students with limited or no background with ICT to achieve their academic goals, a central part of their adaptation involves an intensive period of ICT help seeking. Using anecdotes from phenomenological research, this paper explores what we can learn about our practice as help givers through reflecting upon the lived experience of cross-cultural ICT help seeking and giving on diverse, post-secondary campuses. What surfaces from this investigation is the importance of developing an ICT support and training structure that appreciates the inter-subjective, activity-embedded nature of ICT help seeking and giving. An phenomenological educational approach to ICT help giving would be thoughtfully interwoven into a post-secondary learning environment, not as a remedial construct, but as an integral part of the learning, and help seeking, experience itself.

Keywords: Phenomenology, help seeking, help giving, information and communications technology, post-secondary education, diversity, cross-cultural, international students

Résumé

Solliciter et fournir une aide technologique font de toute évidence partie intégrante de l'expérience étudiante, et ce, tout au long de la formation postsecondaire. Pour permettre aux étudiants avec peu ou pas d'expérience en TIC d'atteindre leurs objectifs universitaires, on doit présumer qu'une composante cruciale de leur adaptation consiste en une phase intensive de demandes d'aide technologique. À partir d'anecdotes tirées de la recherche phénoménologique, cet article explore ce que l'on peut apprendre sur nos pratiques d'assistance grâce à une réflexion sur l'expérience de demande d'aide technologique en contexte interculturel dans les institutions d'enseignement supérieur marquées par la diversité. Les résultats de cette enquête mettent en évidence l'importance de développer une structure d'aide et de formation en TIC qui prend en

considération la nature intersubjective et active de la demande d'aide technologique. Une approche éducative délibérément phénoménologique de l'assistance technologique devrait être soigneusement intégrée dans un environnement d'éducation supérieure non pas comme un correctif, mais comme une partie intégrante de l'expérience d'apprentissage et de recherche d'aide.

Mots-clés: phénoménologie, appel à l'aide, assistance, technologies de l'information et de la communication, éducation supérieure, diversité, interculturalité, étudiants internationaux

This is what the experience of being lost does to you. It makes you afraid and when you are afraid you cannot solve problems. You cannot solve any sort of complex problem at all.

- Kenneth Hill (Martin, Mcinnes & Nason, 1999)

Introduction

A few years ago, I was developing a training program at a university computer lab. Early into the project, a student seated herself at a computer station and shifted her gaze between the screen and her stack of papers. I offered assistance and learned she was a newly arrived, mature international student who had a research paper to complete. I guided her to click on the relevant icon and to my surprise discovered she did not know how to manipulate a mouse. Years later, I entered a computer lab at another university, this time as a graduate student. Soon after I sat down, a peer asked for assistance, bursting with emotion. He was also an international student new to word processing. Over the years, experiences such as these have urged me to explore the lived meaning help seeking for international students. For my graduate research, I conducted a phenomenological study investigating the lived experience of requiring, requesting and receiving information and communications technology (ICT) assistance for international students with limited or no background with ICT. The following is a recollection shared with me by one of the participants:

> I needed to draw some figures. I sat on the computer…how was I to go about this? Then there was a man, a teacher from town here who used to help me, so I gave him a ring. He had traveled and the assignment was to be taken after two days and his wife told me […] coming back after four days. Wow, I rushed to the computer room here, waiting. That was a Saturday. I waited for four hours, you know? Nobody came around. It was just about around a time like this. It's quiet. I felt like weeping. Whom was I going to contact? How was I going to give this out? […] So when that happens, you say your heart's beating, you feel like a physical reaction. It's emotional drain. It isn't that I haven't got the ideas, but the technology was beating me. It was beating me seriously and if it were at home I just would have gone to the Internet café, "Please sir I am trying to draw this, just do it for me."[1]

[1] Throughout this paper are quotes from students who I interviewed as part of my graduate research (Tannis, 2010). I have used pseudonyms in place of the participants' real names.

Leo's anecdote sheds light on what I have come to understand as the deeply embodied and relational lived meaning of help seeking for post-secondary students with limited or no background with ICT. Another reflection from Irena provides a potent metaphor for the lived meaning of seeking ICT assistance for students with limited or no background with ICT: the feeling of being "lost."

> With everything, like, not only computers, but if I think of little radios and little e-fax machine, the photocopiers you guys have here. At the beginning they were so complicated, so many buttons, so many functions, so many things that you can do with them. So…I was lost. Lost in the street somewhere… Lost in a way that you cannot use and do what you want to do.

It may be difficult to comprehend how, while the global digital divide is gradually diminishing (ITU-D, 2010), students like Leo and Irena could arrive at university with only basic knowledge of computers. It may be even more difficult for faculty and student support staff to comprehend the depth of need that such students face and the sense of isolation and uncertainty such students may feel in seeking for ICT assistance. For those who work in a technology rich, post-secondary institution, it may be difficult to imagine a learning environment that is not characterized by multiple computer applications, the Internet and formalized IT Help Desk support.

However, even as a product of our "network society" (Castells, 1996), I experience feelings of frustration and discouragement needing and seeking help with ICT. These moments come more frequently than I would like to admit, when my computer transforms from offering a seamless connection with work, people and information into tightly sealed door. I can switch from email to banking to research in a matter of an hour and I will not think twice. Then, suddenly, I will hit upon a problem and am facing a machine that will not do what I want it to. Arguably, we all have lived experiences with ICT where technology breaks down. Perhaps the most commonly shared lived experience is that of "losing" a document, an anecdote related by Abul:

> I tried this way. I tried that way. Nothing worked. But the problem is that the one command I don't know and that is why I faced a lot of problem that night. […] Actually I lost the whole document. […] I was helpless that night, you know.

This juxtaposition of an integrated, useful, human-technological activity with a dysfunctional, helpless, or splintered relation founds the core of phenomenological literature on technology. Whether it is the click of a mouse, the touching of a screen, or speaking to a mobile device, a relational intent remains: by using some form of human-computer interaction, we seek to identify an icon, image, characters or commands to complete our goals to make something happen. At a granular level, it is through the utilization of an English language word processing program that a student at an Anglophone, North American post-secondary institution is able to express his or her transformation of learning materials and experiences (i.e. readings, lectures, experiments) into an expression of his or her knowledge and skills. While such transformation may be an end result, it is the process of creative engagement with ICT that constitutes the lived experience of interest here. For students with limited or no ICT background, completing an assignment using a word processing, spreadsheet or presentation software program may eclipse their subject-specific knowledge and skills. Chidi described his lived experience in not knowing the specific software required for his assignments as a type of educational disadvantage:

> I had a lot of problems. Like doing stuff in spreadsheets so I had to like ask my friends a lot of times. […] I feel really bad. Like you feel left out. I feel left out. Because every other person is like doing this, solving the problem. So it kind of feels…like people are way ahead you.

Chidi's reflection opens to the lived meaning of his struggles to adapt to the *life-world shape* (Ihde, 1990) of his post-secondary setting, in which a relatively high level of knowledge and skills with ICT was needed to be successful. In the context of internationalization and global migration patterns, increasing numbers of post-secondary students, like Chidi, may come from high schools or post-secondary institutions that were structured in dissimilar ways, including in terms of ICT integration. Students with limited or no background with ICT may include students who are studying in different cultural environments and/or in languages other than their mother tongue. In order to achieve their academic goals, it must be assumed that a central part of this adaptation involves, among other things, an intensive period of ICT help seeking. Inversely, for faculty and student services this involves an intensive period of ICT help giving.

There is a need for critical appraisal of teaching, curriculum and support services to address the needs of the increasingly multicultural reality of North American post-secondary institutions (Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005; Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2004; Robson & Turner, 2008; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010; Volet & Karabenick, 2006). ICT help seeking and help giving are arguably integrated throughout student life experience, from accessing course notes, to completing assignments to registering for classes. What might we learn about our practice as help givers from reflecting upon the lived experience of ICT help seeking? How can we come to know this lived experience in a way that can lead to what van Manen (1997) termed the *tactfulness* of a help giving model that appreciates the *uniqueness* of each individual student?

In the following pages, I explore these questions, focusing on the lived meaning of ICT help seeking and help giving in the post-secondary setting. In the first section of this article, I discuss the value and critique of phenomenology as a method to reflect upon these and other issues related to help seeking and help giving. In the second section, I reflect on the lived experience of ICT help seeking and giving, framed by the work of Heidegger (1997), Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004) and the threefold human-technology relations described by Ihde (1990). In the third section, I return to the question of how we can improve our practice in the post-secondary sector, with a focus on integrating phenomenological approaches to training help givers on campus.

What surfaces from this exploration is the importance of developing an ICT support and training structure that appreciates the inter-subjective, activity-embedded nature of ICT help seeking and giving. A purely transactional, client-service model oriented around notions of user deficits, de-contextualize ICT in a manner that may be viewed as superficial and technology blind in its assumptions. Alternatively, an intentionally phenomenological educational approach to ICT help giving would be thoughtfully interwoven into a post-secondary learning environment, not as a remedial construct, but as an integral part of the learning, and help seeking, experience itself.

Phenomenology as inquiry

In the post-secondary sector, students' past experiences with technology intersect and collide in ways that are unpredictable in their specifics, but foreseeable in general outlines. From a phenomenological perspective, this persistent dilemma is, by nature, embodied and relational,

based on inter-subjective experience through time and in different contexts. It lies in the interconnection and distinction between the description of lived experience and its inter-subjective interpretation, or lived meaning, and the philosophical method to help with its discovery. Husserl (1970/2002; 1981/2002; 1983/2002), often considered the founder of phenomenology, introduced two key concepts which frame this undertaking and have value to multicultural student-affairs praxis: the practice of bracketing, or phenomenological reduction, and the notion of the life-world.

Husserl first introduced phenomenological reduction as a means to uncover the universal *essences* of our own and others' lived experiences. To uncover *essence*, we have to bracket, or suspend, our assumptions and biases, such that "[w]e are forbidden to make use of the *actuality* of the Objective world" (1981/2002, p.130). This includes disregarding "any critical position-taking which is interested in truth or falsity", namely concepts and facts from naturalistic sciences that pre-determined a "guiding idea of an objective knowledge of the world" (Husserl, 1970/2002, p. 172). Husserl clarifies this methodological "radical suspension of Nature" (Husserl, 1981/2002, p. 131) by introducing the concept of the life-world (Husserl, 1970/2002). The life-world was "a realm of original self-evidences" perceived through lived experience "in immediate presence, or, in memory, remembered as the thing itself" (p. 167); everything else is a representation of reality. For Husserl, the life-world concept enables a renewed examination of consciousness, embedded within, rather than defined by, an increasingly scientific, objectified world. This includes the effects of technological inventions upon our lived experience, and ultimately our scientific understanding of the life-world itself. Through the peculiar accomplishment of our modern objective science may still not be understood, nothing changes the fact this it is a validity for the life-world, arising out of particular activities, and that it belongs itself to the concreteness of the life-world (Husserl, 1970/2002, p. 171).

From an educational perspective, the validation of human activity in the concreteness of the life-world has two consequences: the first being epistemological and the second being pedagogical, or androgogical. In the first case, the epistemological significance lies in its constructivist orientation, even considering its essentialist intentions. If our primary source of knowing, from a phenomenological perspective, is derived from embodied interaction in the world, it is entirely possible that our experiential knowledge of the world can both augment and contrast abstracted, factual representation. It also can explain how we can each come to know our world similarly and yet divergently, especially across cultures and in an age of rapid global transformation. A good example in a diverse, post-secondary environment marked by global migration is adjustment to a northern Canadian climate. No matter how much abstract knowledge of winter one has, if one has not experienced walking outside in -40 degrees Celsius (with wind chill factor), it is arguably impossible to fully prepare for this, neither mentally nor physically. In a different, but consistent vein, the amount of knowledge one has about variations in cultural help seeking norms and behaviours will not predict one's capacity for cross-cultural sensitivity in seeking or giving help.

In this way, lived experience becomes the predicate for learning and phenomenological reduction, from an epistemological standpoint, may include the suspension of pre-conceptions or biases that originate in racial, gendered, linguistic or able-bodied perception, among others (Ahern, 1999). Applying phenomenological reduction to one's subjectivity and inter-subjectivity with one's students can be challenging and inspiring. Bracketing requires expanding one's

willingness and capacity to capably and habitually seek a deeper comprehension and appreciation of the lived meaning of students' lived experiences. However, this may tend towards relativism or the ignorance and maintenance of oppressive or objectifying relations, if not checked. This is often considered the most decisive critique of phenomenology, originating from critical theory and positivist perspectives (van Manen, 1997). If our subjectivities influence what lived meaning we experience or interpret from others' experiences, then the very issue of class divides, gendered relations or racism may be obscured, neutralized, or confounded. At the other end of the spectrum, if differences can only be understood subjectively, then we leave no room to account for shared perspectives, values and practices; in short, we cannot explain the most basic premises behind international education and cross-cultural learning.

As an orientation for educational research and practice, phenomenology is context-oriented or event focused; or in van Manen's (1997) terms, it is *action-sensitive.* Phenomenology as pedagogical practice is based upon mindfulness, or *tactfulness*, in the act of teaching or helping (van Manen, 1991). If practiced well, it serves as a philosophical means to positively affect one's way of being with students. It is in the very act of listening, observing and reacting attentively and empathically that one is able to teach or help students respectfully and effectively. Van Manen (1997) encapsulates what practice in a paraphrased quote from Heidegger: "[T]he more important question is not: Can we do something with phenomenology? Rather, we should wonder, Can phenomenology, if we concerns ourselves deeply with it, do something with us?" (van Manen, 1997, p. 45). This statement by Heidegger has made a strong impression on how phenomenology influences my work in multicultural student affairs and my approach as an educational researcher.

A means to develop tactfulness in relation to ICT help seeking and giving in diverse post-secondary environments is to pursue a deep description of its lived experience for students, staff and faculty, with the aim to interpret its potential lived meaning. For van Manen (1997), along with practice of bracketing, this interpretation is best directed by analyzing descriptions of lived experience through the four *existentials* – lived body, lived time, lived space and lived relations – and to continually keep in mind that, "in determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (van Manen, 1997, p.107). In the following pages, I undertake this manner of phenomenological investigation, exploring the lived experience of ICT help seeking and giving through relevant phenomenological writing and through reflection on anecdotes from my graduate research (Tannis, 2010), works of fiction and personal lived experience.

Exploring the lived meaning of ICT help seeking and giving

Contemplating lived experience through different periods of ICT help seeking and giving can reveal multiple layers of lived meaning. In taking this approach, I have made a distinction between novice and transitional phases of ICT help seeking and giving. The novice phase is that of the absolute beginner who faces the task of learning how to use the new technology, in terms of manipulating hardware and understanding the basics of the software. The transitional phase is that of the developing learner, who knows the basics of the hardware and software, but still has much to learn.

Novice ICT help seeking: Attentiveness and familiarity

> Oh, that's so difficult, the photocopier. You open it up, and these three things flash. No there are more than three, and you're supposed to press there, and then you know that, and you look at them and you be like, "Oh my God! What am I supposed to do now?" […] I haven't asked for anyone for the photocopier. […] I haven't even figured it out. […] I just don't use it.

Aline's reaction to using of a photocopier presents a striking example of what might be considered an established and familiar technology, yet has become so computerized that one cannot assume its familiarity. Like Irena, who felt lost in the face of all the technology before her in the life-world shape of her new learning environment, Aline feels overwhelmed by what might seem a simple task. Imagine, then, a newly arrived, international, mature student from a country with limited ICT access, entering a post-secondary institution that has recently adopted new ICT applications, from smart phone apps, e-books, clickers, swipe card service tracking and virtual classrooms. When that student asks a question about ICT, about which technology would he or she begin?

In a story by Maharaj (1997), the author describes the confusion and frustration that can come with the lived experience of facing a task involving foreign technology. In the story, the main character, Homer, a new immigrant to Canada, struggled with completing the required tasks for his new factory job. Homer wrote in his journal,

> I know now I will never learn anything about this batching job. The only thing I know so far is that there are eight tanks, and these mixtures pass through them through hundreds of pipes where they are agitated, aerated, homogenized and god knows what else. There are about five instrument panels where the pipes are attached, and I am supposed to hook up these pipes so that the mixture will flow into the correct tank. Then I have to identify the correct pipe from the hundreds on the ceiling and rush pell-mell to the other panels and do the same thing. So far I haven't done any actual hooking up. And I have to state that the chief batcher, Ravindra, makes matters worse. He doesn't explain anything. All he says is "Watch me" in his careful voice while he is screwing and unscrewing. (Maharaj, 1997, pp. 62-63)

Homer knew there was some purpose to the pipes and panels, but could not explain it. The technology was present, but inaccessible, making him feel so inept he wanted to resign. Even by watching an experienced batcher, Homer was unable to make sense of the actions, because the underlying logic of the factory system was unfamiliar to him.

From a Heideggerian (1977/1993) perspective, this lack of familiarity underlies the essence of being a novice with ICT; unfamiliarity renders much technology inaccessible. For Heidegger, the nature of technology is such that its intended purpose or potential was both inherent in its existence, and hidden in its being. At its root, "the essence of technology has to do with revealing" through its "bringing forth" into "occasioning – causality" (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 318). Our knowledge of what technology can offer is revealed through its "enframing," such that the "actual everywhere, more or less distinctly, becomes standing-reserve" (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 329). Standing reserve can be only in relation to its use.

> [A]n airliner that stands on the runway is surely an object. Certainly. We can represent the machine so. But it conceals itself to what and how it is. Revealed, it stands on the taxi

> strip only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to insure the possibility of transportation. For this it must be in its whole structure and in every one of its constituent parts itself on call for duty, i.e. ready for takeoff. (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 322)

Corresponding to this analogy, a computer's capacity and potential may remain hidden from a student who has little knowledge and experience with it, such that its standing reserve is left mostly untapped, its enframing unrecognized and unrevealed. Tellingly, in one anecdote, Abul relayed his regret at leaving his laptop in his home country once he'd arrived in Canada and learned of the ubiquitous integration of ICT in his studies. In this quote, Abul recalls his reasoning for this decision: "I didn't have any experience with technology, like computers. Even I saw the box or the computer you know, but I didn't actually touch it or didn't open it, you know."

A student, as a novice ICT user, would quickly come to know that the computer was a crucial tool for his or her post-secondary studies, but, prior to his arrival could remain "lost" in terms of recognizing this. The student requires a physical demonstration of how to use the hardware, involving a basic level of explanation, such that the potential standing reserve in the hardware is made evident. At minimum, the help giver would have to ensure shared comprehension of what was being referred to in embodied interaction with the computer. Irena's reflection on one of her novice ICT help seeking experiences depicts the complexity of this comprehension for some students new to Canadian post-secondary learning environments.

> At the beginning, you would say something in English and it would just go out. In one ear out of the other ear. […] And this guy would try to help me, "OK, Control-M that's a new slide." He would do it right away and I was trying to see what keys he would press. I was trying to see what happens with the screen and understand his explanation. [A]fter he left, I would go and try and do whatever he showed me and I would catch most of it, but some of them I would say, "Oh, I have to ask him again." Because maybe he didn't realize that it takes me awhile to see what he does with his fingers, "Control-M" it's a new slide. Well, it doesn't make sense to me.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004) describes this interactive, shared comprehension in lived experience as a matter of attention and judgment in perception. In Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2004) terms, help givers would have to tailor their utterances to the knowledge, experience and attitudes of the person seeking assistance. This requires openness in accepting, firstly that we can only know (and be attentive to) "what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it," and consequently of the "need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching" (p. 47). This is contrary to a passive conception of help seeking, wherein one's development of ICT skills and knowledge is viewed as a form of playful tinkering or "self-discovery" as though using ICT were a strictly individual, psychological experience. It also contradicts the perception of ICT as being neutral and self-evident in its usage independent of our lived experience and thus integrated into a positivist conception of the natural world as the "immanent end of knowledge" (1945/2004, p. 47). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004) defines his concept of attention as follows,

> [A]ttention is neither an association of images, nor the return to itself of thought already in control of its objects, but the active constitution of the new object which makes explicit

> and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon. (p. 35)

In this manner, judgement in perception must be considered as an act of thought, such as a gesture and/or spoken words, bearing upon and in concert with attention. It is neither an independent function apart from attention, nor is it passive; it is in relation to something perceived, something which exists as the object of attention.

In an ICT help seeking and giving context, there are two (or more) people whose attention and judgement are in action. The lived experience of a novice's ICT help seeking emphasizes the help giver's ability to relate to the novice's knowledge and experience. At a novice level, the help giver needs to be assured, to the greatest degree possible, that there is shared attention and judgement in learning basic aspects of the experience. To the novice ICT help seeker, a help giver's actions would be intricately tied with the hardware and software. The help giver and seeker, through shared attention and judgement, both disclose the potential of ICT for particular tasks, in both physical manipulation of its hardware and the verbal explanation of its software. If an ICT help-giver has certainty that the help-seeker is a true novice, very little should be assumed and patient, hands-on, demonstration and practice are critical to ensure both shared attention in order to increase the student's familiarity with ICT.

Through respectful, mutual interactions with students seeking ICT assistance, we may also discover that they are not as novice as we originally ascertained. Indeed, it is arguable that there are few post-secondary students on Canadian campuses who are complete novices in using ICT or who are completely unfamiliar with its potential in relation to their studies. Transitional ICT help seeking may therefore encompass the majority of students seeking ICT assistance on post-secondary campuses, including international students. For these students, intentionality and multiplicity in interpretation become an even more prescient and complex aspect of ICT help giving and receiving, replacing the foreground of ICT embodiment relations.

Transitional ICT help seeking: Intentionality and plurality

Students in a transitional period of ICT help seeking would have increased knowledge of, and skills with, the technology. If you were in a library common area and saw a student in a transitional period of ICT help seeking, you would see him/her working at a computer, with stacks of papers, headphones plugged in, immersed in their task. At one point, the student might stop his or her work and look at the screen perplexed, pressing a key over and over, muttering to him or herself or the computer and looking beseechingly around the room. It could be said that, at that moment, the student is experiencing broken relations with ICT, a central lived experience of transitional ICT help seeking.

One of the most cited examples of broken embodiment relations with technology is that of Heidegger's (1977/1993) hammer. The hammer represents a tangible piece of equipment meant for a fairly specific task. We pick up a hammer and use it with the intention of hammering, since it was constructed with this purpose in mind, and all other devices or implements associated with it, such as nails. For Heidegger, a tool's brokenness opens to us the inherent, specific function of that tool; however, it "always comes too late" (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 329). When we have a broken hammer and try to find a replacement, we discover that almost everything else is unfit for the task. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004) takes this idea further to explore how tools we use are not

only known to us in their usefulness, but become integrated into our perception as consciousness-in-the-world. The hammer analogy could be extended such that through using a hammer we are able see and feel the nail and the board. For example, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004) shows that knowledge of using a keyboard was vested in the fusion of perception between our mind, hands and the keyboard:

> To know how to type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditioned reflex for each one, which is set in motion as it comes before our eye. […] It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. (p. 166)

For Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004) technological tools, such as a keyboard, gradually become "transplanted" into "the bulk of our body" through repeated use over time (p. 166). For those who have limited experience using computers in their academic studies, or who come from countries with different keyboard designs, the standard QWERTY keyboard might be a physical obstacle to ease of self-expression. Oba described her discouragement when she realized the importance of typing speed in the technological life-world of her post-secondary institution:

> I remember once we had a law discussion in the law library and everyone had a computer. And people were just typing away. I'm like, "What?" Because everyone was […] fast. […] [Y]ou can't keep up with the speed, you know. […] We just started using it like often when we got here. So we're kind of not there yet. We're not on the same level. [I]t is not like a level playing field.

Oba's reflection has inserted itself into my awareness of the technological life-world of a Canadian campus, where "everyone has computers" and people are "just typing away." Oba came from a place where computers were still primarily restricted to a formal computer lab for introductory computer courses, or accessed at Internet cafés. She was not a novice in using ICT; however, the pervasiveness and embodied skill in using computers in her learning environment astounded her, making her feel less capable, not because of intellectual ability, but simply because of her ability to type quickly.

For Ihde (1990) interaction with a keyboard also has a hermeneutic lived relation. With our experience using the keyboard/mouse, we can come to know the purpose of the shift-keys or the right and left click of the mouse and use it according to its hermeneutic relation to the computer. This becomes habit for us, in the way Merleau-Ponty (1945/2004) describes habitual action; an incorporation of the keyboard/mouse into our perception and engagement with the computer. Ihde (1990) terms this seamless relationship "hermeneutic transparency," experienced as a kind of "acute perceptual seeing" (Ihde, 1990, p. 94). Developing one's knowledge of and skills in using ICT comes from repeated use and integration into one's life-world. With access and experience to ICT, a student is more able to understand the underlying rhetorical structure of the software program. Ihde (1990) explains the nature of this kind of "seeing" as follows,

> Acute perceptual seeing must be learned and, once acquired, occurs as familiarly as the act of seeing itself. For the accomplished and critical reader, the hermeneutic transparency of some set of instruments is as clear and as immediate as a visual examination of some specimen. (p. 94)

Lacking acute perceptual seeing can lead to misapplication, or missed application, of ICT among transitional ICT users. Leo reflected on a number of such experiences from manually counting words in his word document to retyping text instead of using the cut and paste function. In this recollection, he discussed how he labored over page numbering:

> I didn't know that there was a place you could just say "insert the page numbers", you know? So I would type the page here and then it shifted one line…displacing in my whole work, and I needed to redo it, and then they are taking 14 pages from you. Because you have one line there, they combine the page numbers that you needed to redo the whole thing, trying to eliminate the few lines here and there. So that was all a drain on me. The amount of time I spent doing one little thing. On top of everything else. Having to read and gather facts. The most frustrating aspect was just even to draw, even just the typing. My previous knowledge [is] from a typewriter.

From a hermeneutic perspective, Leo was experiencing a challenge in transferring his writing skills from a typewriter to the computer. While Leo was able type quickly using a typewriter, the functionality of the computer keyboard and mouse in relation to word processing software was not hermeneutically transparent and created a different challenge for him. For Ihde (1990), advances in technology, such as a computer, can provide "a framework for action" that can affect the "intentionalities and inclinations with which use-patterns take dominant shape" (p. 141). Ihde (1990) illustrates this by discussing the way the editing process has been affected by word processing software:

> […] The electronic word processor poses a different instrumental framework and set of possibilities and is now the favoured instrument of many academics. What stands out here is the transformation of the editing process. That has become much easier than with either of the previous technologies, given the ability to re-letter and move whole blocks of sentences around. […] Precisely because the editing process is made easy, composition now provides a focal temptation. The ease of rewriting becomes a way to see the whole project as more malleable and thus unfixed. (p. 142)

Taking this lens, our hermeneutic relation with contemporary ICT therefore also affects the nature of our research, testing and assignment completion in post-secondary institutions. Standardization of writing styles, ease of access of research articles and essays, integration of referencing and citation programs, alter writing and writing assessment. Through the standardization of word processing tools, there emerges the appearance of uniformity, or universality of normative practice. The Western "Germanic tome" and academic cultural construct of citation, end-noting and/or footnoting has become embedded in the software and thus Western notions of academic honesty and normative practice are assumed in its fulsome use (Ihde, 1990, p. 142). In transitional help seeking and giving, we might think that because a student is able to functionally utilize word processing software, he or she also understands its *cultural hermeneutics*. We might assume that he or she grasps the underlying value system and practices in which the software is applied. However, it is entirely possible for a student, new to a Canadian, post-secondary institution, to have a well developed knowledge and skill in using ICT for specific purposes, but to differently interpret the cultural hermeneutic of its application for academic purposes in a Canadian post-secondary context.

For Ihde (1990), this variable cultural hermeneutic element of ICT is due to its "[m]ultistable phenomenon" full of "ambiguity and multiple dimensions" (p. 150). Ihde (1990) concludes that the manifold trajectory of ICT is enabled by the "technologically complex" nature of modern communications, including a background sophistication of instrumentation, which can, in use, be "hermeneutically simple and virtually interculturally available with short hermeneutic learning processes implied" (p. 155). For Ihde (1990), increased access and availability of ICT globally, and the relatively simple hermeneutic shift that modern communications technologies entail, create the semblance of neutrality and universality in application. Yet, as the technology is adapted within the technological life-world of different peoples, regions, cultures and nations of the world, ICT is implemented in similar, yet different ways. This variability reflects what Ihde (1990) terms the "non-neutral" *pluricultural pattern* of modern ICT, which he delimits as an "inclination, not a determination of technology" (p. 156).

Post-secondary students, from all parts of the world, may begin their studies with a sense of comfort in using social media, but may not know how to navigate a student portal or how to successfully engage in an online discussion forum. The student who uses Skype or QQ in a student lounge may not be able to use a word processing program, or may not feel capable using similar communications tools for academic purposes. This is because these tools are not interchangeable. Each may have taken on a particular socio-cultural relation that is not easily translatable to their new educational setting. This extends, for example, to the access of online ICT help, where a transitional ICT help seeking context is perhaps the most ambiguous and challenging of all. Without physical presence, demonstration and guided practice becomes dependent on the help provider's tone, whether it is communicated in written or audible form (Friesen, 2011). Online ICT assistance lacks the non-verbal cues that can help with comprehension, trust and establishing rapport, further complicated by possible language and cultural differences.

To understand transitional help seeking and giving as a mutual relationship between students recasts our perspective on what our help provision role might be in post-secondary institutions. The lived space of learning common areas and the lived relations between students comes to the foreground; the structure and integration of courses and assignments with ICT mentoring and instruction becomes more evident. Rather than seeing ICT help as a remedial act or service, ICT is integrated into the learning and teaching experience itself. In this view, ICT help seeking and giving is facilitated by supporting students in the creation of *a community of student life*, to adapt Gadamer's (2004/1975) words: a collective immersion of students in the technological lifeworld of their post-secondary institution. Thus, as with novice ICT help seeking and giving, we return to the notion of the help giving tone and the centrality of lived relations. Transitional ICT help seeking and giving may involve more technical and specialized knowledge and skill; however, the cross-cultural, lived relation of supporting a diverse student body who have experienced their technological life-worlds in a pluricultural pattern, requires a skill set that transcends technical ability. Holistically, transitional help seeking and giving must consider and incorporate the lived meaning of students' lived experiences seeking support from another. Efforts to enable, or consciously engage, interaction between students who are at novice, transitional or more sophisticated levels ICT help seeking and giving demands a deeper understanding and appreciation of how learning spaces are constructed, how peer mentorship is integrated, and how learning, teaching and help seeking and giving are conceived and incorporated.

Conclusion: Phenomenology as a method for cross-cultural training

Technical knowledge and skill in ICT help giving is necessary for the provision of effective ICT assistance. However, this belies the lived experience of ICT help seeking, which is multifarious and pervasive, not rooted to a particular place and time, and often involving peers in non-formal or informal learning contexts. On another level, ICT help provision can also be quite repetitive and desensitizing, due to the sheer volume of needs and requests. With repeated questions and answers, ICT help giving can feel monotonous or unrewarding, and with more complex issues, it may feel easier or more efficient to just "do it for the student" than to help the student develop their knowledge and skills. Oba's reflection on receiving ICT assistance points to this balance between information and "coming to an understanding" in ICT help giving.

> [T]here was a time I couldn't connect my computer to the school internet. So I took it to [IT help] and the guy was like, "Oh, you have to just take this…You have to go blah, blah, blah, blah…" I am like, "I don't know that!" Like, can you just slow down and like talk, you know.

I have felt like the person blabbing away to an international student in my office, explaining all kinds of things that I felt were important, but to the student, were unrelated or even obvious. I have learned over time to ask as many questions as needed in order to situate a student's question and understand how he or she is approaching the problem. I have drawn from my phenomenological research and writing to focus upon, and experience, its "action-sensitive" trajectory, as described by van Manen (1997):

> [H]uman science is concerned with action in that hermeneutic phenomenological reflection deepens thought and therefore radicalizes thinking and the acting that flows from it. […] [T]o become more thoughtfully or attentively aware of aspects of human life which hitherto were merely glossed over or taken-for-granted will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting in social situations that ask for such action. (p. 154)

Action-sensitivity, in this sense, has been a sustained effort to deepen my "pedagogical" or "practical understanding" as a help provider, as I continually reflect upon the lived meaning of my inter-subjective, cross-cultural interactions with international students (van Manen, 1991, p. 85).

This practice has led me to pursue a phenomenological approach to training help providers on campus, be they students, staff or faculty. In developing this approach, I have collaborated with colleagues who hold various helping giving roles at the university. In creating these workshops, I have emphasized the "intuitive, dynamic and non-rational features" of helping others, consciously counter-balancing the tendency for training to stress "a technical production process, with input, treatments and outputs" (van Manen, 1991, p. 105). There are four aspects to the approach that I will discuss in my conclusion: the use of the phenomenological interview; the exploration of personal and inter-subjective life-world identity; the incorporation of imagination in situational, action-sensitive life-world help seeking and giving experiences; and the phenomenological emphasis on tone, listening/observation and reflective practice.

A starting point in this training approach includes a form of phenomenological interview that presents "fill in the blank" questions regarding help seeking, such as *"When I seek help from a professor on an assignment that I am having difficulty with, I feel…"*, or *"Seeking help from a professor on an assignment on a topic I don't understands means that I am…."* I also include these same questions, but incorporate new identities, such as *"When a new international student from a very different cultural and learning environment seeks..."* Participants work in pairs and I often have words available to help start the discussion. The intent is to help orient the group towards lived experience and lived body, space, time and relations, and to challenge assumptions, without stating so directly. These are incorporated into the words themselves. Questions are included that are anecdotal: "*Can you remember a time when you received excellent/poor help? What do you remember about this experience that makes it so memorable? How did you feel? What do you recall about the space you were in? The way that your help provider supported you?"* These paired discussions are then debriefed as a group and we discuss the lived experience of help seeking, considering it from the perspective of lived meaning in a diverse, cross-cultural learning environment.

A second activity is what I call the development of an inter-subjective life-world identity. This involves the completion of a student profile, in which I hand out a form with questions including the student's name, age, gender, family status, field of study, travel experience, hobbies, fears, sources of pride, languages spoken, and then specifics to the help seeking context, such as knowledge of ICT, experience using ICT, level of ICT access at home, etc. This is a paired activity and, included in the profile, are questions for the help providers being trained to discuss together. These questions include: *"What is a stereotype that this student must deal with regularly? What is a pattern of experience this student has in relation to working or studying in groups? What do this student's closest friends say about him/her?"* The paired participants must both fill out the form for this imaginary student, because they then go into groups of four trainees, each with a different imaginary student to share with each other. These small groups are asked to discuss questions such as, *"What is realistic to you about this imaginary student? What seems unrealistic? Why do you feel this way?"* After all participants have shared their profiles, I usually engage in a conversation with them, with participants sharing specific profiles and discussing what they felt was realistic or unrealistic and how they felt in the process of creating the profiles. This is important to discuss, since it is about trying to understand another person. I often ask the group what other questions they might want to know. The emphasis is upon inquisitiveness and interest in the lived experience of others.

If there is time, I often have the participants work in their groups of four and discuss different scenarios. In the case of ICT help seeking and giving, this would include examples such as, *"One of these students is sitting at a computer in the library learning commons and is having difficulty with a computer application. How would you approach him/her as a help provider? What might happen during this interaction? How might the student feel? How might you feel? What would make this a positive help seeking and giving experience for both of you?"* This same set of questions may be used for two to four of the imaginary students, such that there is a discussion on how each interaction might be similar or different. The debriefing can include this discussion on the idea of lived meaning through lived experience, such that the larger group can share thoughts and feelings about the lived body, lived space, lived time and lived relations of cross-cultural ICT help seeking and giving. These can be introduced at this time, with the idea

that we can always deepen our understanding of these lived existential and that they serve as philosophical tools for reflection.

This leads to a prescriptive aspect of this approach to training, where I discuss phenomenology as a practice of reflection and tactful, sensitive lived relation with others. In the cross-cultural context of help seeking and giving on campus, I often discuss how assumptions and tone impact our lived relations. As part of this, I have integrated "facts" into the presentation, such as statistics regarding student enrolment and library or student service usage by different demographic groups. I usually have this as a set of true/false or multiple choice questions in order to open the dialogue on what we feel we "know" and what we "experience." This can enable the trainees to consider how their lives may or may not be segregated cross-culturally, such that they are not "seeing" or "experiencing" diversity. As a framework for this, I often integrate anecdotes focused on help seeking and giving, from my research, other qualitative research or from fiction. I have also integrated art that helps with evoking emotional or psychological response, such as Edvard Munch's painting, entitled *The Scream*. Images such as *The Scream* provide a means to depict visually the existential moment of feeling helpless, when help may or may not be available. In Munch's series of paintings, a person stands alone, lost, anxious, afraid, his or her call for help as if swallowed in a vacuous tunnel, while in the background, one can see passers-by, seemingly unaware of, or unaffected by, his or her suffering.

What I have asked, and continually ask myself as a professional in my field is, "*Why do some students feel such helplessness, while their peers mill about in the hallways, and while support staff and faculty are able and willing to help them?"* What I have come to feel is that unfamiliarity with their surroundings, including the technological life-world of their new learning environment, conceals the support that can be provided by another. This image opens dialogue to the shared lived meaning of being lost; a metaphor that I have found is often used by international students in relation to adapting to their new learning environment, which includes ubiquitous ICT integration. This metaphor has helped me recast the concept of help giving from an instructional or remedial role to one of a guide, to one who is seeking to find the intended directionality of each student seeking assistance and as one who wants to know how that student has arrived at that particular place in his or her life journey.

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