



Capture the Unexpressed: Anecdote as a Device in Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research

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Abstract

I sit on the edge of the bed of my youngest daughter and read the fairy tale of the Three Billy Goats Gruff. My little four-year-old daughter has heard this story thousands of times and simply loves it. In my eagerness to create a good story and a good setting I add some personal description to the story. Then she who is thrilled with the story makes a strange face and corrects my telling: "No, mama, it is not like that. You have to tell the truth".

This article explores whether a story as an anecdote could contain some form of truth or add 'empirical evidence' to hermeneutic phenomenological research. In daily life the story can reflect what one thinks is true; it can be a new thought or the remembrance of an experience in one's own life that is similar to that which is read or seen. The story can reflect multiple thought experiences depending on the listener and reader. The spoken word is an image and the language possesses us more than we possess the language. As Risser explains, "the question is no longer where are we to find the words for what we cannot say, but where are we to find the right word for what we cannot at first say" (Risser, 2010, p. 11).

Words allow us to express our thoughts, meanings, feelings or dreams so that other people can learn to know the truth about us. Words can also hide or express wrong meanings and sometimes we do not have the right words in mind. The words by themselves do not stand for truth or untruth; instead it is the use of a word that is decisive. We have the language and words to give expression to ourselves and to explain what we think and mean, but what if the language is not sufficient, falls short or is inadequate? How do we tell the truth if language falls

short or if the words have different meanings and the truth falls apart?

In everyday life we tell stories and we do not think twice or dwell on what these stories are actually telling us; their meaning may slip by us. During the lunch break, for example, we may hear things such as "let me tell you what I did yesterday" or "do you want to know what happened early this morning". Although we think these are just stories and explanations they are actually much more, they tell more than words can express.

You want to know someone? Heart, mind and soul? Ask him to tell you about when he was born. What you get won't be the truth; it will be a story. And nothing is more telling than a story. (Setterfield, 2006, p. 26)

According to Setterfield (2006) no truth is revealed by telling a story and yet nothing is more revealing than a story. A story is more than words, although it is not true it is the end of many words and it reveals the teller. We want to get a hold on an experience that eludes us; we know that somehow there is something but we cannot find the words to express it. This is not

just typical of daily life, it is also necessary for human science.

In the educational field there are many examples of the experience of being a good teacher or of being in a pedagogical relation, but it is difficult to describe exactly what makes a good teacher or how to be a good teacher. The experience of a good teacher is thus so much more than words. In our daily lives as teachers, moments of wonder easily elude us. This is partly because we do not take the time to stop and wonder and thereby get closer to an understanding of what we sense. These almost ungraspable aspects of daily life are important in the field of early education. I would like to call these vague and hard-to-pin-down moments where important acknowledgement may slip through our fingers 'slippage' moments. Hermeneutic phenomenological research has historically studied these slippage moments through anecdotes. Van Manen (1997, p. 116) says: "An anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us". However, these anecdotes have not yet achieved status as a research method. Anecdote in phenomenological research is more than a story and is valuable by way of providing a way of gripping the slippage. This article attempts to reveal some aspects of anecdotes as a useful device in hermeneutic phenomenological writing and investigates how to describe that which might elude our attention and transcend our linguistic ability.

Lived through and experiences

Van Manen (2003, p. 578) demands that all pedagogical research be grounded in praxis and human experience:

Human experience is the main epistemological basis for qualitative research, but the concept 'lived experience' (translated from the German *Erlebnis*) possesses special methodological significance.

Van Manen (1997) has described this formal qualitative research methodologically in his book *Researching Lived Experience*. The concept Lived Experience Descriptions (LED) is adopted from "lived experience" developed by theoreticians such as Dilthey, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. According to Van Manen (1997), Dilthey describes lived experience as a reflexive or self-given awareness that inheres in the temporality of consciousness of life as we live it. Husserl thinks of lived experiences as expressions of the full-fledged acts of consciousness in which meanings are given to intentional experiences. Van Manen (2003, p. 578) goes on to quote the familiar line from Merleau-Ponty: The world is not what I think, but what I live through. Van

Manen (1997) also suggests that anecdote could be a way to bring forth the praxis and lived-through-life. We experience life all the time but some experiences make a greater impression on us than others. The following anecdote attempts to tell a student's experience of a new teacher:

After we got Bob, the new teacher, math is so easy for me. I look at him when he explains on the blackboard, and he always tells lots of stories to describe the problem. Then math is easy. I know my friend Eva does not like Bob, she does not understand his stories and thinks he is a windbag.

This anecdote shows a young student's good experience with her teacher. It also shows her feeling for her best friend who does not like the teacher. The anecdote also reveals more than what the students feel or mean; it points to different ways of learning and different pedagogical relations. The reader of this anecdote may also recognize the expression of the phenomena of mastering and of understanding something new.

Social science researchers have also drawn upon lived-through-life and lived experiences in their work involving a history of narration. The theoretician Ivor Goodson (2001) distinguishes between life story and life history. He claims that the rendering of lived experience into a life story adds one interpretive layer, while the move to life history adds a second layer and a further interpretation. This is similar to what Van Manen (1997, 2003) describes in the process of transforming or rewriting a lived experience description into an anecdote. Goodson argues more strongly than Van Manen that life history is a method. Both theoreticians base their arguments upon Dilthey's work and his view of lived experiences. According to Goodson (2001) "Its foundations can be seen in the notion of historicism as expressed by Wilhelm Dilthey" (p. 7). In social research, life histories are used to reveal the research subject's background and to understand the subject; in phenomenological research LED tries to reveal the phenomena or the subject in focus for research. The main factors discouraging the use of life histories (or anecdotes) as a methodological device involve the time required and the time-consuming nature of the work. Owing to these constraints life history as a method has been largely replaced by case studies and participant observations in social science research (Goodson). This may be one of the reasons why anecdote as a device is seldom used in human science.

If an anecdote can bring forth a deeper understanding of a phenomenon it is worth developing anecdote as a methodological device in all human science research.

This is important even if it is difficult to pin down experiences that we do not have the proper language to speak or write about.

Anecdote as method

Various articles concerning methodological subjects grounded in European thinking from the Utrecht School in The Netherlands can be read in an attempt to reveal some methodological meaning of anecdotes. Joseph Kocklemans (1987) describes hermeneutic phenomenological writing in his anthology entitled *Phenomenological Psychology – the Dutch School*. He views Buytendijk as one of the first Dutch scholars to contribute to the field. He positions Heidegger as the first hermeneutic phenomenologist theoretician and sees Edmund Husserl as one of the first scholars to apply phenomenological method in The Netherlands. Although many writers use anecdotes, they do not discuss the anecdotes methodologically (Levering & Van Manen, 2002). This seems to be at the core of the methodological view in hermeneutic phenomenology; the text shows which method it is based on and it is difficult to exclude the method from the text. Kocklemans (1987) refers to this characteristic when he says that theoreticians become more engaged by doing phenomenology than by writing about the method. This is in agreement with Van Manen (1997, p. 30), who states that phenomenological research is noted for not having a method:

While it is true that the method of phenomenology is that there is no method, yet there is tradition, a body of knowledge and insights, a history of lives of thinkers and authors, which, taken as an example, constitute both a source and a methodological ground for present human science research practices.

Although there is no one clear method reception in hermeneutic phenomenological writing, there is a methodological groundwork of history, tradition and knowledge. Well-known researchers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Otto Friedrich Bollnow, Frederik J. J. Buytendijk, David J. van Lennep, Martinus Jan Langeveld, Jan Hendrik van den Berg, Gabriel H. Marcel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have published scientific research texts filled with anecdotal material. For example, David J. van Lennep's (1987) text "The Psychology of Driving a Car" tells about the experience of driving a car and simultaneously describes the methodology of writing hermeneutic phenomenology:

First of all we must note that the work-object of the driver is not his car, but the road. His goal is his destination point, but his field of action is the road. His work is the part of the

road to be covered. His instrument is his car which preferably he must know as well as possible and be able to operate. (p. 217)

Van Lennep (1987) describes driving as a whole and the driver of the car is part of the phenomenon and is totally concerned and focused upon the road and where he is and where he is supposed to go. Similarly, in hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher is also a part of the whole and must focus on the research subject and questions and not on the methods. In this metaphor, anecdotes can be seen as forming part of the "car" and thus making it easier for the researcher to write and reach his destination. Van Lennep's text indicates that words can tell more and can mean more. In this way, a story about driving a car is about more than what may be heard or read. The anecdote of driving a car reveals both the experience of driving a car and the experience of writing hermeneutical phenomenology. The ability of an anecdote to reveal experience is the reason for focusing on anecdote as a device in academic writing in all sciences.

It is also worth noting that the same anecdote can be used in several different articles to reveal different points. An anecdote is never apart and cannot simply stand alone - herein lays the hermeneutical approach - instead an anecdote is a part of a whole text. An anecdote discloses and reveals several lived experiences depending on the whole text and the reader. It is also important to point to a contrary important issue:

A phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description. (Van Manen, 1997, p. 31)

As Van Manen (1997) points out there will always be other experiences, the lived experiences of others and other anecdotes that can have a richer or deeper description. This does not mean that the anecdote is insignificant. Two people who are together in the same situation or experience the same phenomena always provide two different lived experience descriptions. Thus, an anecdote does not have to be a true story; it simply (and importantly) has to be true to the narrator's experience. The experiences are at the core here; it is the lived thoroughness experience that is revealed rather than the story or telling from a narrator.

The form of an anecdote

Anecdotes are defined as secret or private stories (Anecdote, 2010). The word comes from the Greek

anecdota, which means “things unpublished” (*anekdotos*, from *an-* “not” + *ekdotos* “published,” from *ek-* “out” + *didonai* “to give”). The intention of the anecdote is thus to tell or publish and refer to something not yet published. The term “things unpublished” also suggests that anecdotes reveal things that are not yet published to the self or things that slip our consciousness or reflections. Saevi (2005a) describes anecdotes as examples through which the deeper structures of an experience can be explored. The person lives-through this experience of deeper structure or slippage. Thus, there has to be a lived experience before the anecdote. In addition, the person must live-through the experience both experientially and bodily in time and space.

Although we experience all the time in our daily lives, we do not tell stories about all lived-through-life. It is impossible to tell stories about each moment of our lives; instead we choose to tell stories about experiences with deeper structures. These are experiences we have difficulty explaining without telling more than exactly what happened.

In my earlier work (Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008, pp. 6-7) I developed an anecdote about Lars (presented below) that may show some of this deeper structure in relation to an experience with his teacher:

My teacher always tells us stories from his childhood, and today he told about his last log rafting experience. He nearly drowned on this last trip. I sat at my desk spellbound, and when I looked around me, my classmates' glances were glued to the teacher's eyes as he strolled along the row of desks, his hands gathered at his back. He looked out at the class, but still he seemed not really to be seeing us. In the telling, when his best friend was on one of the timber rafts and he himself on the other, he said, “I'm here,” while touching Daniela's head, “and my best friend is there,” as he lightly touched Trygve's desk. “It is when I try to jump to the other raft that I miss and plunge between two drifting rafts into the dangerous stream with all the logs rushing down” he said. My teacher always touches us or our desks with caring fingertips when he is telling us things.

If we read this anecdote quickly it reveals a teacher who loves to tell stories from his own childhood. If we take a closer look it reveals a student who is thrilled by his teacher's story or his teacher's way of telling stories. This anecdote can be illustrated in connection to the student Lars. Lars first lived through the experience in the classroom with his classmates and teacher and he then transformed it into a lived experience description that was told to an

interviewer. This description was in turn transformed into an anecdote in an article.

It is also important to be note that this anecdote does not belong to Lars. An anecdote does not necessarily have to be produced by the original narrator. Thus, this anecdote is a retold story from an interview with a 12-year-old boy regarding his relationship with his teacher. Some notes from the researcher's first interview with Lars confirm the first encounter with this story:

Interviewer: Is there something you want to tell me about?

Lars: Yes... my teacher, he always tells us stories. Always!

Interviewer: Are there some of these you can share with me?

Lars: Yes. Today he told me one (*Lars stands up, goes behind the chair and looks over me, out over the room*).

Interviewer: Yes...?

Lars: Well, my teacher always walks when he talks. I have to show you (*Lars put his arms behind his back and starts walking to and fro with a serious expression on his face. He doesn't look at the interviewer but out in the room*).

Interviewer nodded and goes on writing...

Lars: (*With a deeper voice*) this was my last log rafting and I was just the same age as you... I was on this timber and my friend was on that (*Lars stopped walking and touched the desk between interviewer and his own chair. Then he explains in another voice*) ... my teacher always touches us when he is story telling.

The interview continued and towards the end of the interview Lars was asked to retell this story particularly to the interviewer while sitting still in front of the interviewer. The story was later rewritten and Lars was asked to read it and say what he thought. He was asked whether he recognized the story and whether this was his experience or if the interviewer had interpreted the story differently. Although the anecdote and the interview both tell the same story and describe the same situation they do so in different ways. The interview had three focus areas: Lars's experience of his teacher, the researcher's perspective and the overwhelming story. The interview as a research method is clear and easy-to-follow. In this method the student's words and actions are retold word for word and the subject or question is clearly focused. The interview thus describes Lars's movements and his retelling of his teacher's story.

In contrast to the interview's different focus areas, the

anecdote has a single focus area - the lived thoroughness or the experience. The anecdote tries to show the deeper structures of narrator's experience; in this case from the perspective of a young student. It is important to note that the anecdote tries to reveal a single but recognizable experience. Although the narrator is able to recognize the story the readers are unable to recognize the narrator. The reader of this anecdote can imagine sitting in the classroom and listening to the teacher. The anecdote could also evoke a similar experience from the reader's own everyday life. The feeling of a scary log rafting and near drowning experience reflects similar near-death experiences for the reader. It could also correspond to a hidden experience the reader's own childhood. The experience rewritten as an anecdote using well-chosen words can reveal some slippage from our own consciousness that we do not know we have. Another anecdote from the same work (Saevi & Eilifsen 2008, p. 1) concerns Oda's experiences of feeling smart:

When my answer is wrong, I know it immediately because Per [the teacher] looks at me with this particular humorous glance and says, after just a little pause: "Yes...?" Then I understand that he wants me to give the question a second thought. He just leans back comfortably and waits. That's why I like him so much. I feel relaxed and smart with him.

Oda would probably recognize this moment and similar moments when she feels smart. This anecdote shows a young student's experience with her teacher and yet the deeper structure in this anecdote allows the reader to recognize the expression of the phenomena of feeling smart. The anecdote thus needs to be close to the experience and the lived through world.

The language of anecdote

Both [poem and novels] can be enormously helpful in bringing certain phenomena closer to us and thus making us "understand" them, helping us to understand ourselves and the world in which we live. (Kocklemans, 1987, p. ix)

Kocklemans (1987) brings together a number of essays that actually show the phenomenological-psychological method at work. However, he does not consider the methodological device by only bringing forth anecdotes in texts. He also points to poems and novels as methodological devices. Poetry and novels have the ability to impress people and cause a change in attitude. One example is the renowned Harry Potter series by Joanne K. Rowling (published from 1997 to 2007). This series is published worldwide and makes us believe in magic or in hope for outstanding

students. Anecdotes borrow some of the language of poetry and novels, and can sometimes be collected from these sources. However, there is one major difference between these sources and anecdotes. According to Saevi (2005a) although anecdotes can be similar to novels in the written form they differ from poetry or novels in that while these forms of expression have many approaches and are ambiguous, a hermeneutic phenomenological text (such as an anecdote) is clear.

However, there is something about poetic language that is important in hermeneutic phenomenology. A novel is poetic and tries to describe a subject in rich language and to develop a certain tone in the text. Poetic language can evoke the non-cognitive knowing that lies in the lived life, the body, the world and the relations. Thus, poetic language evokes a tone. In an anecdote this tone is important for revealing an experience. It is therefore also possible to collect anecdotes from sources such as novels and poems in hermeneutic phenomenological writing. The extract below contains an anecdote from a novel that describes the encounter between an old teacher, Jochumsen, and a young boy:

When he came up to him, Jochumsen seized him and tickled him between the two thin sinews of his neck. The boy bent his head back and smiled a broad smile full of love. "Why don't we have you?" he said.

The headmaster took the boy's ear between his fingers and rolled it back and forth. He pulled him along toward the gate.

"We want you!" the boy said again. "Why can't we have you?"

"Because I am so old and vicious," the headmaster said. Nobody could see them, and the boy needed comfort now. He gripped the boy's hair through his cap.

"I am so fierce that boys from the second grade go and hide in the chimney when I come into the room," he continued and the boy held his hand while laughing breathlessly. (Bjorneboe, 1959, p.101)

This anecdote is from the novel *Jonas*, translated into English as *The Least of These* (Bjorneboe, 1959), and tries to show how a strict teacher may not actually be that strict despite appearances. Those words used in this anecdote say more than they actually mean and there is a story behind the story. The words and the sentences are contradictory. In the anecdote the teacher pulls, takes the boy's ear and is vicious and fierce. In the meantime the boy smiles a broad smile full of love while laughing breathlessly. Readers who have read this novel know that Jonas loves Jochumsen and other teachers who touch him roughly and caringly. Although an anecdote is not the same as

a novel or poem, anecdotes borrowed from these sources can call attention to the phenomena or experience we are trying to reveal. This attention may be the tone Saevi (2005b) speaks about when borrowing language from novels or poems.

The term anecdote thus implies a “revelation of secrets” and poetic language can be used to evoke a tone in the text in order to reveal these secrets or to explain the situation. In this regard, Kocklemans (1987, p. ix) claims:

In human reality there are certain phenomena which reach so deeply into a man’s life and the world in which he lives that poetic language is the only adequate way through which to point to and to make present a meaning which we are unable to express clearly in any other way.

Kocklemans (1987) thus confirms Saevi’s (2005b) statement regarding the importance of the tone in a text. Within a text the tone is above the word or is more than the word can express. However, there are several differences between novels and anecdotes. A novel is not necessarily real and grounded in the real world; instead it performs an experience so that the reader reveals his/her own lived thoroughness or understanding of the meaning or message from the writer. A poem or a novel can employ fantasy to allow the reader to see or understand the meaning or message. An anecdote is not intended to communicate a meaning or a message; instead it is simply a real story from the narrator’s experience and the experience itself is the meaning or the message. The intention of an anecdote is thus to reveal a lived experience.

Grip the slippage

The anecdote describes an experience from one point or one person’s perspective and it is a text that tells something special in a unique way; it grips the slippage. To compare a normal research text with anecdotes we can look to Palmer’s (2007) well known book *Courage to Teach*, where Palmer writes about being and becoming a good teacher. His subject is comparable to the subject of Saevi and Eilifsen’s (2007) text in “*Heartful*” Or “*Heartless*” Teacher? Palmer (2007, p.11) declares:

The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts – the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.

Palmer (2007) suggests that the connections between the good teacher, their subject and their students are held in teachers’ hearts. This may be true if we understand what Palmer is suggesting. It is easy to

read this quotation and to think that we know what the text is saying. However, parts of this assertion remain elusive. The statements below represented some suggested answers to the question of ‘what is a good teacher’. These answers come from interviews with 7 second grade students:

A good teacher is kind to me!
A good teacher sees me!
A good teacher listens to me!
A good teacher smiles often!
A good teacher gives lots of homework!
A good teacher is strict!

None of these answers reveals the lived life experience of having a good teacher. Instead, they only raise new questions such as: What constitutes being? How often does a teacher have to smile before being considered a good teacher? In relation to Palmer’s (2007) suggestion that connections made by good teachers are held “in their hearts” it is possible to ask what it means to have a heart in which intellect and emotion are held. The experience of a teacher-student relationship may reveal an interesting perspective and help us gain a better understanding of the phenomena of a good teacher or teacher’s heart. The following anecdote from the movie *The Browning Version* (Polk, 1994) provides a different perspective on the transcendent focus in a teacher’s heart. Taplow is a student who objects to the class’s low opinion of the teacher, who they have nicknamed “Hitler of the lower grade”. Taplow cares about this teacher. In this scene, Taplow enters the classroom and is met by his fellow students’ defiant questions:

Taplow, you should know. What’s up with the crock (the teacher)? Why is he retired?
Taplow looks down, somewhat embarrassed, perhaps, while his attempt to respond is drowned out by another student who interrupts by answering:
There is nothing wrong with him!
A third student wonders if it might be his sick heart, but the first student responds:
No, it is not his heart. There is nothing wrong with him, and it is probably pills.
Taplow defensively says: Grow up, bullies. It’s not pills. It is his heart.
Another student asserts loudly: It can’t be his heart. He hasn’t got one!
And another student confirms this by saying: Right! He’s a sadist!
But I don’t think he hates people, *Taplow objects*, I don’t think he likes people either, and he doesn’t care if people like him. (Polk, 1994 cited in Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008, p. 7)

Taplow and the other students have different opinions of the teacher, although they are in the same class.

Taplow may know this teacher better than the others because he takes private lessons with him. However, it is not important to know why Taplow defends his teacher, but to look at how he experiences his teacher. This anecdote is an effort to express this experience in terms of him being a teacher with, or without, a heart. Taplow does not reject the suggestion that the teacher lacks heart; instead he simply describes the teacher's way of relating to people in a matter-of-fact way.

When this anecdote is juxtaposed with Palmer's text it seems to puncture us by showing tiny details about having a heart that would otherwise be elusive. The anecdote shows more than a teacher's heart, it reveals something deeper and more transcendent. It is this aspect of a teacher's heart that Palmer's quotation misses. Although both texts highlight the complexity of a teacher's heart, the second text is closer to experienced lived life and praxis. The anecdote's affiliations to praxis or Dilthey's lived experience are important for gripping the slippage. Saevi (2005a) describes anecdote as a short story with a punch, which is intended to make comprehensible these notions that easily elude us. A (strong) anecdote does not attempt to reveal all the subject's experiences, but instead attempts to reveal something in the experience that is familiar to others and thus recognizable. The anecdote shows that Taplow likes and defends his teacher despite the teacher's lack of a heart. Thus, to be in the same practice or in the same situation does not mean the same experience. This complexity is further illustrated by another anecdote where a teacher speaks about an experience from his childhood:

I have dyslexia and I was not able to read properly when I started in grade four. My new teacher was considered a very poor teacher among my fellow students. He did things like talking disapprovingly to students and he explicitly favoured some students and disregarded others. However, to me he was my rescuer. I was clever in mathematics, which was his particular subject, and somehow I became one of his favourite students. He did not seem to mind my inability to read, and gave me good marks in spite of my bad written performances. This teacher helped me see myself as a capable person. (Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008, p. 6)

This anecdote suggests that experience is more complex than simply good and bad. This teacher is looking back at his childhood and reflecting on both good and bad memories. Although he states that the teacher was bad, he also views him as a rescuer. This anecdote raises many problematic issues and contains one punch experience. This punch experiences concerns the way in which a fifty-year-old experience

has a powerful impact that has lasted a lifetime. Importantly, this experience has been true for this person all his life.

The end in anecdotes

In phenomenological writing, the phenomenon the research tries to reveal is in the centre. The purpose of phenomenological research is to bring the phenomena to light. Anecdotes can help throw light upon other life experiences. An anecdote is more than a rewritten story from lived life; it is a pre-reflective retold story from a lived experience description (LED). Saevi (2005a) describes the anecdote as uniting the 'what' and the 'how'; the statement and the expression. The anecdote is thus both the 'what' and the 'how' in a text. Anecdote should always point to the 'what' of the subject or phenomena. In addition, an anecdote also shows how to find the answer to the quest or research. Anecdote is more than a methodological device used to find an answer to a piece of research. Instead, it is as if the anecdote holds the whole text and the whole text is held in one anecdote. If the anecdote splits from the text the wholeness disappears and the anecdote becomes only a story.

It may be the meaning of the word anecdote as unpublished story that makes it unworthy as a methodological device in the first place. In phenomenological research, anecdotes are a well-known methodological device and many texts are crammed with anecdotes and with poetic language. Nevertheless, human science and pedagogical research seem to have an unspoken suspicion of anecdotes. According to Van Manen (2003), anecdotes are not traditionally seen as evidence - instead they are viewed as "only anecdotal" and as such are not permitted to furnish a proper argument. An anecdote does not really tell the truth in terms of a traditional way of verification of the truth; it rather tells another kind of truth. This truth comes from the Greek word *alethia* and is a truth that simultaneously opens up and hides the object of focus (Alethia, 2010). The insecurity surrounding the use of the anecdote may arise from questions regarding the anecdote's truthfulness or what can be produced by scientific 'proof' using a story from lived through life.

Anecdotes do not have to be true stories. However, they do have to be true to the narrator's experience. Anecdotes are intended to become officially published and this serves a deeper structure of truth or validity. Anecdotes lay validity upon the experience of the narrator. Hermeneutic phenomenological writing simply requires that phenomena are brought to light. Anecdotes can throw light upon a phenomenon because of their features and they can thus throw light upon other life experience and praxis, which is important in all human science.

Although anecdotes are often described as hard to pin down, the opposite is often the case. When we read a good anecdote something hits the inside, reflecting the readers' own experiences and resulting in the readers' own anecdotes emerging. At their core anecdotes are experiential examples of the phenomena that help us sense the world. Anecdotes can therefore help to bring forth the praxis and lived-through-life because they have a lasting quality of representing themselves iconically (Saevi, 2005a). Anecdotes are iconic and they therefore refer back to something familiar, to something recognizable or representative. This allows us to experience existence by letting the moment linger and grip the slippage. Anecdotes are experiential examples of the phenomenon that may add contrast, depth and diversity and may be confirmed through repetition.

The anecdote is both the spoken and the unspoken; it points to the inexpressible that slips the written word, it is both the truth and just a telling. The anecdote needs to be close to the experience and the lived through in the world because of its intention to reveal lived experience. It is the lived through experience that is revealed, not the story or telling from a narrator. The experience is true to the narrator and to the reader. This way of writing is hard but worth the effort because it allows for the clarification of the phenomena. Anecdote is important because it can illuminate the shadow of unconsciousness and make it easier to grasp the experiences that easily slip between our fingers.

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