Developing Phenomenology in Learning

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Abstract: *This paper aims to offer a hypothesis that there should be phenomenological development in learning. More specifically, this paper proposes phenomenological foundation for learning development. The paper is not written based on a certain thought; however, it is written for a pragmatic purpose: to develop learning process. Also, it proposes that teachers implement phenomenology method in their teaching activities and answers the two questions: why is it important to develop phenomenology method in learning? and how can the method be implemented in learning? There are some notions stating the importance of phenomenology as a learning approach: (1) Learning is an interactive process between teacher and students, students and students, and students & their learning environment; (2) Learning is a process in which students are not a party without knowledge at all. They already have experience, be it coming from themselves or outside their environment. This also happens to teacher; (3) learning is not simply an instructional process in which students are passive, but it is a dialogical process between students and themselves, students and teacher, and students & their environment; (4) learning also needs to make students and teacher active in finding new meanings, so it becomes innovative, creative, effective, and fun. Some requirements are needed to implement phenomenology in learning development. One of them is that teachers need to build Learning Circle Context (LCC). Phenomenology development step starts from this, guided by a facilitator cum LCC participant.*

Keywords: learning process, phenomenology, learning approach

1. Background

Learning process looks simple: a teacher teaches students knowledge using certain method and media. Therefore, some teachers as well as students do this as a routine. Every morning, students go to school and do the assignments. After that, they are busy with their own world which seems to be separated from learning and education. Teachers seem similar. They go to school, come into the class, teach, and give assignment. Outside school, they are busy with their own world and activities, disconnected with teaching task. This cycle lasts until students face final examination or graduate, then teachers will have new students to teach, doing the same routine.

However, if put in a wider spectrum, learning process is actually not a routine. It is a complex process and thus has to be seen more comprehensively. In learning, there is not only interaction between students and teacher but also "struggle" about the future of students and generation. Therefore, learning process can be considered as a step to reach better objectives. This is similar to what Socrates states that "…not simply for living, but better life is worth living." To reach better life, learning process needs improvement and change. Without change and improvement, learning will be trapped in routine and be far from expected result.

To date, research in education has been considered as an attempt to increase education quality and improvement. Many studies in education, especially connected with learning ranging from examining to finding theory, have been conducted. Results of the studies have greatly contributed to education and learning. However, education condition, especially in Indonesia, still has weaknesses. One of them is that education cannot fully support socio and cultural change in society.

Technology, including information and telecommunication technology (ICT), has developed very fast and given significant influence to personal life and society. The influence can be both positive and negative. The positive influence is, for instance, one is not restricted to time and space. Besides this, completing a task can be faster. For example, finding information in the past was very long, while nowadays, it is very easy to get information. On the other hand, education is still busy with school building, budget, and other administrative problems. In some regions of Indonesia, teaching-learning processes are still conducted traditionally, in which teachers still use chalk and board, and internet is still alien in the regions. There is a gap between inside and outside school. Ideally, school can bridge the gap, otherwise it cannot reach the education objectives.

Faced with socio cultural changes and educational demand to deal with the changes, this article proposes a hypothesis that there needs to be phenomenological development in learning. More specifically, this article gives phenomenological foundation to improve learning. This article, however, is not written based on a particular thought, but it is written for a pragmatic purpose with regard to developing learning process. Also, this article aims to give contribution to teachers in implementing phenomenology method in their teaching-learning processes. Two issues addressed in this article are: (1) why does it need to develop phenomenology method in learning? and (1) how can phenomenology method be developed in learning? To answer the issues, the article addresses such points as learning as an interaction process, phenomenology as a research method, the importance of phenomenology in learning, and the implementation of phenomenology method for learning development.

2. Learning as an Interactive Process

Learning process is basically an interactive process of all situations surrounding an individual. Learning is a system whose components interact as a unit. Learning system components include student, teacher, objective, material, infrastructure, evaluation, and learning environment[1]. The Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 Year

2003 regarding National Education System also states that "learning is an interactive process between students and teacher & students and learning sources in a learning environment."[2]

The interaction is not simply interaction, yet it has an objective: a change to the betterment[3] . Cronbach as cited in also argues that "learning may be defined as the process by with a relatively enduring change in behavior occurs as result of experience or practice"[4].Thereby, it can be concluded that the keyword of learning interaction is change, a change to the betterment. To achieve the change, the interaction done should be productive, namely interaction which can create and develop positive attitude from both teacher and students.

It is, therefore, important to build interaction in the form of effective communication. Meaning is the essence of communication. For example, people having conversation will always give meaning to the message they convey and receive. In educational context, making meaning done by parties involved in communication is in the corridor of finding truth through creative stages of making meaning. In communication context, meaning and meaning making will always emerge. Making and receiving meaning can be seen from various perspectives, including individualism, social interpretation, and criticism. In the meantime, receiving message focuses on how the message is received. Making and receiving message is basically how one understands, organizes, and uses information contained in the message. As has been known, communication is a process focusing on message built by various information.

The question emerging from the statement above is: what should be given meaning? are there methods/ways to give meaning? what is truth? how to reach the truth? Answers to these questions are part of science development. Science development is based on philosophical foundation and research methodology which lead one to the procedure of finding truth. Philosophically, truth finding procedure exists in epistemology. The truth produced through this process is called epistemological truth. The truth in science also only reaches epistemological truth. It means that the truth is in theoretical truth which later can be contested by another theory.The contestation of a theory by another theory is the dynamism of science.

Meaning and meaning making is done by human to find truth. In scientific context, truth attempted to be found is scientific truth because this truth builds knowledge. Scientific truth by making meaning to social realities is done through research methodology. As one of aspects in science, research methodology reviews various aspects and steps to find truth in science. Consequently, the quality of truth depends on the quality of work procedure. If the procedure is good, there will be truth which is scientifically sound. Apart from research methodology, there is also logic to find truth. In philosophy, logic is considered as one of sciences used to get truth.

Meaning and meaning making should be done to anything, so truth can be obtained. In scientific context, there needs to be scientific truth because such scientific truth builds and promotes science. Scientific truth itself is supported by facts. In philosophy, fact can be classified into four groups: (a) sensual empirical fact, (b) logical empirical fact, (c) ethical empirical fact, and (d) transcendental empirical fact.

Meaning making of fact is done through various ways. According to Muhadjir, meaning making method covers four ways: (1) Translation: is an attempt to present the same material in different media; the media can be from one to another language, from verbal to visual, etc, (2) Interpretation: still relies on the original material, but background and context are investigated to find clearer concept and idea, (3) Extrapolation, stresses on human thinking ability to catch something beyond the presented object, (4) Meaning making, is a further attempt to interpret. Meaning making requires humans' integrative ability in terms of their sense and thought. Just like extrapolation, presented material (object) is only signs or indicators of something beyond them. Meaning making can reach ethic and something transcendental[5]. In the meantime, the application of meaning making to the four empirical facts above can be different in every study.

3. Phenomenology as a Research Method

Phenomenology is one of qualitative research methods which started to develop in the first decade of 20th century. As a method, it comes from philosophy, especially connected to factual worldview. This can be traced from German philosopher Immanuel Kant(1724-1804) through his book *Critique of Pure Reason*published in 1781. Kant explains the foundation of division on various objects. He grouped them into phenomenon and noumena. Phenomenon is any object that can be observed, experienced, and felt, while noumena is an object of self. "Phenomena constitute the world as we experience it, as opposed to the world as it exists independently of our experiences (thing-in-themselves, 'das Ding an sic'). Humans cannot, according to Kant, know things-in-themselves, only things as we experience them."[6]As a method, phenomenology holds a strong foundation[7].Since then, phenomenology keeps developing.

As a method, phenomenology investigates phenomena, especially connected to meaning. Its focus is on visual objects which we experience or feel. Phenomenology aims to describe rich life experience. Research project, according to Husserl, is to 'go back to the object itself.' 'Object' here refers to life experience. "To go back to the object is to go back to the world preceding knowledge, knowledge which always talks"[8]. It means that phenomenology requires researcher to be open-minded and let meaning emerge[9]. Phenomenology deals with people, including their past experiences, beliefs, and values. They live in the world full of cultural and social influences[10].

Phenomenology attempts to uncover meaning from phenomena by reexamining several layers of moral, ethic, social, and cultural influence. Thereby, phenomenology does not create new information, but interpret figurative meaning of experience[11].Phenomenology finds first meaning in life experience, pre-reflection of external influence. "Phenomenology must describe what is given to us in direct

experience without being blocked by pre-conception and theoretical idea."[12].

Life world, also called *Lebenswelt*, is a key concept and investigative focus of phenomenology. Life world is people's world, full of worldview, relation, and experience. This consists of things surrounding us, our feeling, our experience, and our body, and our relation. This is an interactive locus among ourselves,perception, and experience in which we live with others meaningfully[13].

This is a daily world experienced by everyone. Husserl describes this life world as a "direct experience world," "existed world" and "given."[14]. Another opinion states that this life world can be defined as a living world, the world which has qualitative meaning, not objective but having human relation"[15].

In phenomenology, this world is pre-elective. It means that this world has been existent before we think about it or include it in language. The idea of life world is that in our daily life, this world is full of complex meaning forming our daily action and interaction. On the other hand, the term "world life" focuses more on individual life and social world instead of introspective inner world. There is no inner world, and human is a world human. Only in the world a human knows himself.[16]

The phenomenologists state that there are certain elements in this world which are connected each other: self, embodiment, social, specialization, temporalization, and discourse[17,18].The inter-connected elements act as a lens which will be used to see data. The researcher's task is taking the dimensions out and show all of them structurally. The entire objective of life world research is to show and explain a living world by expanding our understanding about human and human's experience.[19]

In life world, human awareness always deals with something around the world. Awareness always means being aware of something. When we are aware of something (object) and it is connected with us, it means that the object is for us. In such a way, subject (we) and object mix together and co-constitute each other.This leads to another important concept in phenomenology, namely intentionality. Intentionality is unseparated from world for human,[20]and Merleau-Pontydescribes intentionality as the world is already ready and has existed for human.[21]

In research, the researcher's objective is to explain this intentionalityto relate to participants' awareness (what and how they experience).In other words, the focus is among people and meaning. For example, the significant finding of research on a woman with multiple sclerosiswas how she was very worried about her relationship to her children[22]. Besides, she was depressed with her numb hands, meaning that she cannot feel her children's soft skin. Intentionality in this context deals with the relationship between a mother and her children.

Phenomenology asks, "what kind of experience is it?";"Is the experience meaningful"; "how does this world come to my life and to them (participants)?"There are two kinds of

phenomenology resarchers: How is this life world for me (or my participants)? andHow to help participants express their world directly.

Meaning is found by a researcher based on the researcher's attitude and how the researcher generates questions. Specifically, the researcher aims to 'bracket' or suspend previous assumption or understanding to uncover a phenomenon as it is. Bracketing process is often misunderstood as as attempt to be objective and not bias. On the contrary, the resaercher aims to be open and to see the world differently. This process needs to eliminate what things should be, not focusing on how the researcher experience things.

There are some variants of bracketing. In a research context, it includes: (1) Epoche of natural science, in which there is a researcher's prohibition on theory, explanation, scientific conception, and knowledge in order to go back to natural attitude of pre-scientific life world (namley apprehensionof unreflectivedaily life experience)., (2) Reduction of psychological phenomena, in which belief in appearance of self in life world is delayed. On the other hand, it focuses on subjective meaning and appearance., (3)Husserl's reduction of transendental phenomenology; this is a more radical version of epoche in which 'God's view' tends to be neglected as it is considered not realistic by contemporary researchers.[23].

More technically, Van Manen explains important elements in phenomenology, among others, : (1) life world, is a world life experienced daily., (2)Experience, is one's experience in particular time and place., (3) Awareness, is one's awareness of something in himself, (4)Intentionality, is an inseparable connection from human to the world., (5) Reduction, focuses on meaning of special experience to find essence.,(6) Essence, is meaning interpreted as it is[24].

4. Developing Phenomenology in Learning

Based on the description above, it can be seen that in phenomenology all life experiences have meaning. Meaning is multi-layer and multi-dimension. Human– which means science –can only be communicated through text, so it can become phenomenological writing. Through reflection, researchers come to differentiate structure in life experience communicated through writing and avoiding their interpretation. This structure of experience is also called Theme, yet very different from 'theme' in other qualitative studies.

Creating something from texts and life experiences by interpreting their meaning is more accurate in understanding process. Findings and formulation of thematic understanding is not a bound process. It is a kind of free action to 'see' meaning. Phenomenological theme can be considered as the structure of experience[25].Theme is a focus experience of meaning, a simplified process to get meaning. In identifying a theme, a researcher desires to understand life experience and to be open to find new meaning.

To have learning understanding of the themes in life experience, a researcher must be responsive. For example, to

find a theme which can lead one to his life experience integrated with learning, a teacher must be able to respond it in the classroom.

Pedagogy is multi-dimension. Pedagogy has never been seen in one definition. This is a practical business, which is planted in teacher and students' life experiences. Yet there are not many observational experiences. It comes as a real life situation for them. Pedagogy must be able to decide which is suitable and which is not for an individual child in education. This is relational.

As a form of research, pedagogy shows that one has relational knowledge about children. A teacher who does not understand a child's inner feeling will not know to whom he is teaching. Teacher is an educator who handles children, understands children, and has a commitment to children's educational interest and development toward maturity[26].

As stated by Van Manen, the term pedagogy here covers more than effective teaching and learning principles and more than tool-kit strategy. Also, pedagogy is not only a term which is used to say a similar thing differently. Through pedagogy, we must try to understand more about what is important for the improvement of our children's education[27].

How to develop pedagogy in learning? Can phenomenology research methodology be accessed by a classroom teacher? Is it practical? Will a teacher be involved with this? Can a teacher explain the layer of influence? Can a teacher do 'reduction' of their thought to find new meaning? Does phenomenology research give a 'way' to critical pedagogical reflection? Is it possible that this methodology has wider application outside learning environment?

As regards, it is interesting to discuss what some schools in Queensland have done. To develop phenomenology in learning, the first step is making Learning Cycle Context among teachers.

1) Learning Circle Context

This is similar to study group, yet its members are teachers who talk and discuss phenomenology. All teachers having participated in developing learning using phenomenology were invited to join the group. Out of 16 teachers, 9 teachers were interested, and 6 teachers made commitment. The activity was conducted in the school. In the process, there were only 5 teachers left. Those 5 teachers taught at years 2-4. The club met weekly in 45 minutes during lunch break at a Conference room in Administration block. The teachers were given a pen and notebook to write. They were appreciated. Writing tasks were done between meetings.

Module development has been facilitated in Term 3. The group started to work in Term 4 and is still going on. School pedagogy development also started in Term 4 and is still going on. The facilitator, who was also an evaluator, was a participant who was active in all meeting sessions.

2) Methodology: Exploring experience

Van Manenproposes the structure of phenomenology research adopted from hermeneutics.Findings reported are from the researcher's point of view. Along the research, the facilitator supports teachers in terms of explaining research elements of phenomenology using user-friendly terms. This is more beneficial and practical instead of letting them being disturbed with technical terms[28].

The first step is to agree with phenomena which is interesting for all members. The elements of learning dimension are adopted as a theme or 'structure' in life experience which will be explored. Guided by the facilitator, teachers can identify various anecdotes of social support phenomena. This is based on what they experience in their life. This phenomena is chosen as a positive place to start exploring life experience.

What is social support? Does it mean that becoming a social individual is supported? What does it look like? Feel like? How does it feel for me? Does it mean similar for teacher and students?

Second, teachers write about their life experience, whether they are supported or not in learning. This is a personal description. If teachers cannot describe the support like the one experienced by their students, they can deal with their life experience. Teachers are supported to generate rich narration about their feelings and perceptions which they experience. They bring an idea into awareness to recall whether the good things are supported or not. They answer: is the support meaningful for me? Phenomenological writing starts from this.

The next step is being involved with reduction process. *How many life experiences which are related to contextual aspects (time, place, person, emotion)?;and finally how many which are not related to belief and personal values?* This is the next step; and this step becomes the step of finding essence of life experience, a new meaning of teacher experience.

How can the new meaning obtained by the teachers affect their learning?

Teachers go back to their life experience in the class life. They choose student, incident, talk, or event with students to re-describe their life experience to generate text. Sharing process, reflective reduction, and essence finding of phenomena in life experience are repeated.

Through this, there will be meaning comparison between what has been experienced by teacher and students in learning. Finally, teacher synthesizes two meanings of life experience to produce a phenomenological text. Then this text becomes the foundation for next learning process.

5. Conclusion

Based on the abovementioned description, it can be concluded that: (1) There are some things that explain the importance of phenomenology approach in learning: a) Learning is an interaction process, namely interaction between teacher and students, students and students, and students & their learning environment.,b) Learning is a process in which student is not considered empty, but they already have experience coming from both themselves and

outside environment. This also happens to teacher, c) Learning is not only an instructional process, in which students are passive recipient, yet it is dialogical process between students and themselves, students and teacher, and students & their environment, d)Learning also needs to make students and teacher keep innovating and creative to find new meanings, so learning becomes active, innovative, creative, and fun. (2) To implement phenomenology for learning development, there need some requirements, whether it is in teacher or school level. In this regard, one of the effective ways is from teacher by forming Learning Circle Context (LCC). From this point, the step of phenomenology development starts, guided by the facilitator who is also the member of LCC.

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