A phenomenological approach to inclusion: prioritising textual analysis and lived experiences

Israel Chukwuka Okunwaye - Doctoral Researcher, School of Education and Social Work, Birmingham City University

The paper puts forward the argument that there is the need to engage with Phenomenology, as an investigative tool for educational research as it offers a crucial strand in the methodological milieu for qualitative research. It enables the researcher to probe and decipher possible understandings from participant's data in a research activity. There are ambits to its use. These are the posers – How do we understand the need to construe a document that has been generated, or analysed against, or with? And what value should we place on a person's narrative and the interpretations deducible? The phenomenological inquiry interweaves both the conceptual and non-conceptual, the argumentative and evocative (Manen, 2006), it extends the debate on possible misunderstandings and gaining reliable meanings and further enhances the criticality element in research. The plurality of perspectives would also arise from the construction that has been given to it (Miriam, 2007). This means developing questioning that revolves around the value we place on a person's sense of experience and what it means to them, the interpretation they give. To dig deep into the interpretations, one could ascribe to that perspective of lived experience, the story of the story through their lens, how they tell an event or narrate what happened, all of which is non-negligible and would form the basis for critical analysis. There is a growing consensus of the need to go beyond the surface in qualitative researching of viewpoints, to analysing the meanings in more depth, to handle any obscurity or blur inherent (Robinson, 2015).

There is the doubt however, whether Phenomenology can work on its own, or whether it is better effective when it benefits from a cluster of methods fit for qualitative analysis. The idea of a mixed method which brings in a quantitative aspect, may be an elongated dimension to the debate (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2008; Burgess, 2008), but a triangulated bag may allow the researcher to explore how a focus group with a constituent opportunity for participants observation, can in tandem allow for views to be heard and stories noted which could form the basis for analysis; also, the possibilities for thematic analysis of emerging themes of interest and itemising carefully the implications of the findings. Phenomenology allows for bringing incisive understanding to a concept and adopting a level of criticality in our approach to extrapolating the issues (McWilliams, 2010). Deconstructing meanings from embodied perception is possible through this method, as it allows dealing with lived experience (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). To even perhaps, finding out the experience from which the participant speaks whether one of expertise and the implication of that (Silverman, 2004). The need for authentic and reliable data pre-empts the need to be mindful of the sourcing, participant details, and ensuring the analytical and ethical framework is equally factored in.

In applying this method to understand inclusion for a group of learners studying in a college or Higher Education setting in a law context, one would first hear first-hand their general viewpoint, stories and lived experiences, policy opinions, and gather observation notes, of which the qualitative data engendered then forms a solid base for analysis. Are there emerging themes in the texts and experiences? Is there an additional layer of reflection in contemplation of time of events? How can we construe the opinions of experts and demonstrate how our data matches with existing body of academic work on inclusion in a range of categories, and the policy shifts and tensions. Of note, and some caution however, Max Van Manen points out phenomenology may not be effective as a diagnostic or prognostic tool, being that it does not give access to figuring the problems, mental state of an individual, as psychologist would, but allows for meaning to have structures that helps us understand the significance of human phenomena as fear, anxiety, and even grief (Manen, 2016). In essence it allows us to ask, is there poetry to a person's words with undertones, or are there cases when we take the words for its meanings? It's that awareness and sensitivity that is needed (Grover, 2010). It sets the structure to gain the meanings and to explore the inherent meanings as well. How we use it is key, I suggest utilising it as part of a multi-prong strategy can enhance its effectiveness for textual and lived-experience analysis. I suggest as a teacher and researcher there is need to be aware of the relevance of the views of our learners in formal education, the evidence for that, and canvass that engaging with a method that enables the decoding of the import of those range of perspectives can enhance one's pedagogy and the quality of education being delivered to credibly meet requested needs than assumed set of preferences, in the long-term.

References

- Burgess, S. (2008) Adopting a Mixed Method Approach in School-Based Research. *Building Research Capacity Newsletter*.
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: OUP.
- Bloom, B., Krathwohi, D., and Masia, B. (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals.* New York: Longman.
- Gorard, S. (2003) *The Simple Role of Readers in Social Science Research* (Continuum Books).
- Grover, S. "Implicit Informal Qualitative Research Processes Embedded in Legal Proceedings: A case example" (2010) 19 (1) 26 *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 3.
- Hodkinson, P. and Macleod, F. (2008) Mixing Methods and Blending Data: The case of re-searching learning. *Building Research Capacity Newsletter*.
- Robinson, W. (2015) *Documentary Research*, in Hartas, D. Educational Research and Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- McWilliam C. (2010) *Phenomenology* in Bourgeault, I. et al (edrs), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research. London: Sage Publication Ltd.
- Miriam, K. "Toward a Phenomenology of Sex-Right: Reviving Radical Feminist Theory of Compulsory Heterosexuality" (2007) 22(1) *Hypatia* 210
- Moore, T. (2013) Critical Thinking: Seven Definitions in Search of a Concept. 38(4) *Studies in Higher Education* 506–522.
- Nickolas, J., & Ors, (2010) Conceptualising, Developing and Assessing Critical Thinking in Law. *Teaching in Higher Education* 285–297

- Silverman, D. *Who Cares about 'Experience'? Missing Issues in Qualitative Research*, in Silverman, D (ed.) (2004). Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

- Starks, H. "Choose your Method: A Comparison of Phenomenology, Discourse Analysis, and Grounded Theory" (2007) 17 *Qualitative Health Research* 1372.

The spaces in-between

Kevin Dajee – Chartered Psychologist, Educator & EdD student, Faculty of Health, Education and Life Science, Birmingham City University

This 'think-piece' is in response to the reflections of an educator and developing researcher in the aftermath of the first UK COVID-19 lockdown. My own research is exploring the lived experience of pastoral educators in a sixth form college during this challenging time and is influenced by the works of Lefebvre in looking at ideas about Space (Lefebvre, 1991) and Rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004) whilst also acknowledging changes in how technology has shaped sixth form pastoral practice during this time. This piece represents a particular aspect of my research, that of liminal space. I hope, as a piece, it opens educational spaces for further debate and critical reflection to challenge the boundaries of our professional responsibilities as educators as well as acknowledge areas of discussion that can develop practice and support practitioners.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). This novel virus was first identified from an outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. Attempts to contain it there failed, allowing the virus to spread to other areas of Asia and later worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2020; Zhu et al, 2020). On the 20th of March 2020, after the announcement of a national lockdown, England's schools and colleges were closed to all students other than key workers' children and those deemed vulnerable. By 31st March 2020, schools and colleges in 170 countries were closed as a result of COVID-19 (World Bank, 2020). These decisions affected over 1.5 billion students around the world and over 11 million school and college students in the UK (UNESCO, 2020; Department for Education, 2020). Stay-at-home mandates and lockdown restrictions increased work from home (WFH) practices during the first UK COVID-19 lockdown. This was an order from the UK government that restricted movement of a population and was a mass quarantine strategy for suppressing or mitigating a pandemic by ordering residents to stay and work from home except for essential tasks or for work in essential businesses. While WFH offered many benefits (such as working from home in order to reduce infection, being able to spend more time at home, and possible work flexibility), navigating work in non-traditional contexts were a challenge. This lockdown forced many educators to embrace remote working and in many educational sectors like in sixth form college, educators were made to work from home, a must rather than an option and with students at home, educational practice took place online. This resulted in a sudden and radical disruption to the usual routines and interpretations and uses of space. I have never been more aware of personal space; the houses we are confined to, the two-metre-distance we maintain, the proximity of urban living, feelings of isolation and the impact that WFH had on educators supporting students. Both educators and students needed to adjust to the new spaces and patterns of working and even though the spaces were familiar they were also unfamiliar, strange and uncertain when in the context of online WFH practice.

A change of space and routine

Change came fast and as humans we tried our best to adapt accordingly. "Two metres" and "no mixing with anyone from another household" were such powerful ultimatums in redefining our personal space and our physical connections with others and redefining and challenging our natural human instincts to connect with others. The physical spaces we occupied at home were now even more meaningful not just for the occupant but anyone else living with them, with intense moderation and scrutiny in spaces everywhere else outside this setting, with fines being issued for breaking the rules. We had to consider our proximity to others in an unnaturally mindful way and, as the weeks passed by and lockdown loosened its grip, our perception and interpretation and reflections of personal and working space had extended and evolved.

Lockdown redefined personal and working space in a plethora of ways. These two spaces in fact could be seen as collapsing in on itself during this event, occupying both spaces and turning into something new. WFH could appear to encapsulate the ultimate collapse of the private and public spheres (Habermas, 1989). It could also be seen as a liminal space, transitional and in-between, eventually expecting that we would return eventually to the 'old' ways and spaces of working.

The transitional spaces to be explored – The Liminal

The concept of liminal space emerged from the Latin word 'limen' meaning on a threshold or at a boundary and evokes a period of time/space that is 'in-between' typically during an individual's usual routine (Turner, 1974), or rite-of-passage (Van Gennep, 1960). Van Gennep's theory states that this period of liminality is transitory, temporary and can be an anxious time where, for example, known norms, behaviours and identities are suspended thus giving way to uncertainty. Such a concept could be applied to the exploration of spaces in education.

For the most part, the spaces explored in education are designed, defined and frequently managed; they focus on spaces such as offices, staffrooms, meeting rooms, class-rooms, lecture halls and sports facilities (for example, Baldry, 1999; Middleton 2014; Chugh and Hancock, 2009; McElroy and Morrow, 2010). However, little attention has been paid, particularly within organisational studies to the liminal spaces of the workplace in education, these are spaces that are transitory, temporary (acknowledging temporality) and in-between. Lifts, doorways, stairwells, the photocopy room, the changing room, toilets, cupboards, temporary office