Module 2: Phenomenology Design to Understand Reading Achievement for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Phenomenology Design to Understand Reading Achievement for Students with Learning Disabilities

This study seeks to understand the experiences of classroom teachers and explore why there are inconsistencies of teachers not implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) for reading comprehension in secondary classrooms for students with LD. Aware of teacher’s experiences, feelings, and perceptions are critical to consider with understanding the phenomenon with the lack of EBPs being implemented in classroom instruction. To investigate this phenomenon, a phenomenological design is the best approach to analyze and interpret the phenomenon. Phenomenology is the account of human experiences thorough the descriptions provided by the people involved. The experiences are known as *lived experiences.* Lived experiencesallow the researcher to understand the meaning of an individual’s experience (Donalek, 2004). This study will be presented in two-fold. First, the history and rationale of why a phenomenological design is the best approach to address my phenomenon. Second, the components of my phenomenology design.

Historically, phenomenology originated within a philosophical movement that began in the early 20th century. The first world war had ended, and people were trying to make sense out of their lived experiences. There was a crusade where people where interested in how individuals’ interpret life. More importantly, how their interpretation shaped their experiences. There were several people ranging from Georg Hegel, Immanuel Gant, Franz Brentano, and Carl Stumpf who are associated with this philosophical movement. Still, one man named Edmund Husserl was considered as the greatest figure of this campaign, which would later be called phenomenology in the twentieth century (Padilla-Díaz, 2015).

Edmund Husserl was a mathematician born in 1889 in modern day Czech Republic. He was a professor at the University of Gottigen (1901-1916) and University of Freiburg (1916-1928) (Giorgi, 2009). Husserl rejected the belief that things in the external world exist independently and that information about things in the external world were reliable (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Husserl argued that the positivistic paradigm was inappropriate for studying a phenomenon because it could not interpret a phenomenon within the human world. The phenomenon in the human world consists of feelings, morals, virtues, and life experiences (Giorgi, 1985). Husserl maintained that people cannot be certain about how things appear in an individual’s consciousness. He stated, the consciousness is vast, comprised of imagination, perception, and logical forms. Husserl stated that people interpret and make meaning within their own consciousness (Donalek, 2004). Husserl claimed that to be certain of anything, one must ignore or filter out the outside experiences, reducing individual contents of personal consciousness relating to their lived experiences (Giorgi, 2009). This allowed an individual’s experience to be treated as a pure phenomenon. Husserl named this philosophical method phenomenology, as a science of pure phenomenon. Husserl proposed phenomenology as an experimental method based on the conscience of a phenomenon in which the pure essence of the contents of an individual conscious stood out (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). This permitted individual perceived lived experiences to be exposed and studied.

With Husserl, subjectivity is considered basis of all his objects. He is trying to understand the view of the world experienced by another (Zahavi, 2003). Husserl considers it a descriptive approach, trying to capture and understand an individual’s view of the world. He believes that one’s individuals thoughts are real, and these thoughts impact their conscious, which creates their reality. Husserl coined the idea of *life experiences* within phenomenology (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). He concludes that each person has their own subjective experience of the world in which they live. Husserl believes that phenomenology permits a researcher to deconstruct another individual’s experience to help that researcher understand the individual’s reality. This approach is concerned with a detailed investigation of human experiences.

In general, phenomenology seeks to understand one’s truth and logic with ways of discovering human existence and experience. Researchers can go beyond factual accounts and values subjective meanings given to human encounters with the world. Phenomenology emphasizes how that encounter impacts their world. This notion of *seeking to understand* provides contexts into why a phenomenological design is the best method purposed to study my phenomenon.

To strengthen my argument, according to Giorgi (2009) a main word in phenomenology research is *describe*. The research describes, as accurately as possible, the phenomenon, trying to remain true to the facts. The design interests include understanding social and psychological phenomenon from the perspective of the people involved. A researcher applying phenomenology should be concerned with understanding the lives and experiences of people with the issue being researched (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales, 2007).

I want to understand from a teacher’s perspective, why they are not using EBPs to support reading for students with LD in their classroom. What feelings, emotions, and attitudes are teachers experiencing, in the classroom, that consciously supports their justification of not using EBPs? I need to explore if these experiences are shared by other teachers in other classrooms. I will have an open-minded approach to understand teacher’s reality with students with LD in the classroom. A phenomenology design approach will allow me to have a suspension of judgment and any biased positions I have regarding the phenomenon. This suspension of judgment ensures objectivity as a researcher and my findings.

Overall, Creswell et al., (2007) states that the best measure to determine if phenomenology is an appropriate research design, is if the research problem requires an understanding of human experiences common to a group of people. The criteria for a group of people should consist of three to fifteen people. The group members must be able to articulate their lived experiences as it relates to the phenomenon. In believing that my phenomenon fits this criterion, I will move forward in discussing my design.

**Method**

To articulate and validate my design with clarity, I will briefly describe the different types and classes of phenomenology and general usage criteria. The different types of phenomenology are (a) descriptive or hermeneutical- it refers to the study of personal experiences and requires a description of the meaning of phenomena experienced by the individuals; (b) eidetic or transcendental- it analysis the essences perceived by consciousness with required to an individual experiences; and (c) genetic or constitutional- refers to the analysis of self as a conscious entity (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Padilla-Díaz, 2015).

After receiving IRB approval (Do I need to mention this?), my design will be based on a descriptive phenomenology design. This design permits me to keep the individual voice throughout the research without conceptualizing their voice through analysis (Creswell, 2009).

Dissimilar than the dictated methodology of the positivist sciences, phenomenology does not follow a design or model (Creswell, 2013). Yet, it does attempt to adhere to a set of guiding principles that researchers must keep in mind as they proceed. Several of the guiding principles include (a) human beings must be studied in the ways that are subject to verification through observation; (b) its goal is to uncover the belief patterns of human beings that provide their meaning, guide their actions, and have been constructed in the act of living; (c) understand and respect the meaning-making structures of the individuals with whom they are engaged, rather than imposing a priori categories; and (d) to study human life in ways that will foster understandings about the processes individuals engage in as they construct meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) These principles challenge researchers to construct methods of investigation that are appropriate to advancing our understandings of human life in an area of inquiry. Thus, researchers must ground their undertakings in the view that human life is constructed in meaningful experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Taking these guiding principles into perspective, the design of my method section will be framed around a version derived from a descriptive phenomenological design, that includes a condensed five-step system of research that holds Husserlian Phenomenology as its philosophical foundation (Giorgi, 1985; Zahavi, 2003).

**Participants**

I will incorporate a purposive sampling technique to select my participants. This will ensure that my participants meet my criteria. I will look for teachers in secondary education who have experience with the phenomenon that I am researching (Sokolowski, 2000). As a result, the participants in this study must be at least 10 classroom teachers who teach in grades ranging from six through twelve. The participants teaching experience will expand from novice teachers to tenured teachers. Teachers must have taught at least one full year in an urban or suburban classroom setting. All teachers must have had an opportunity to teach at least one class to students with LD either in a general education setting or special education setting. With gender, I will attempt to find a balance of male to female ratio, including teachers who identify as other. I will recruit participants, with a monetary incentive, who meet my criteria.

As a former school administrator, I have personal connections with school districts that may make it easier for me to access local school districts. Therefore, I will contact local school districts to inform them of my study and solicit support to work in their school system. I will work with the identified school district to send out emails to secondary teachers who teach students with LD. I will obtain informed consent forms from each participant that meets my criteria for my study (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). If I am not able to find 10 participants in my study, I will use a snowball sampling technique with the participants who met my criteria (Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2012).

**Data Collection**

Data will be collected with a variety of techniques. My first technique will be interviewing. This technique is appropriate for phenomenology and it aligns with descriptive phenomenology (Bevan, 2014). My interview questions will be open-ended questions with semi-structured (face-to-face) interviewing to collect my data. It is important to have open-ended questions because this will permit me to capture individual’s feelings, emotions, and interpretation of the phenomenon. The semi-structured questions will give me the flexibility to change the level of deepness, with the conversation, of my questions to gain a deeper perspective of an individual’s thinking and feeling. This will allow me to address my phenomenon directly (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Interviews reveal individual’s experiences, knowledge, feelings, and events that relate to the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). I will set up my interviews outside the teacher’s workplace. I want to remove the teachers from their working environment. I do not want the teachers to get distracted with task they still need to complete in their classroom. This might cause them to rush through the interview. Taking them outside of their working environment can be a distresser and help them answer the questions with integrity. I will use a setting that is quiet. Environments that are loud can be a distractor to the process of the interview. Also, places where other teachers go to distress can be a distraction. I will offer three locations and let the teacher choose. I will allot 45 minutes per interview. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

Another technique I will use is a focus group. Participants are selected on the criteria that they have something to say about the phenomenon. Focus groups allow me to obtain information about a range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about the phenomenon (Rabiee, 2004). I will us the same procedure discussed for recruitment in the interview process. A caveat to the recruitment process for the focus group is inviting individual teachers to participate. The invited teachers will come from my individual interviews. The teachers will be selected based on their responses to the interview questions. Individual teachers who displayed characteristics of authenticity, being outspoken, and providing depth in their interview responses will be considered. The focus group will be conducted in a secluded area away from the workplace with 5 to 7 participants. The focus group will range from 45 to 60 minutes. I will attempt to conduct several focus groups. I will continue with the groups until a clear pattern emerges between each group that expresses the groups feelings about the phenomenon. The focus groups will have a group facilitator and an outside individual, not associated with the school, taking notes. All sessions in the focus group will be recorded. The recorded focus group will be transcribed.

Lastly, I will use field notes to collect data with my interviews and focus groups. Field notes are critical in retaining data gathered during research (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Field notes serve a variety of functions. Specifically, they aid in providing rich descriptions of an encounter, interview, focus group, and document’s valuable contextual data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).

I will use a notebook, as my field notes, to capture body language of the participants and my initial reactions from the interview or focus groups. I will use this document as a piece of reflection throughout the process of interviews and focus groups. I will identify themes in my field notes as I discover them. My notebook may have words, phrases, and diagrams. It will be as comprehensive as possible, without judgment (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). I will write an entry within 24 hours of completion of an interview and focus group.

**Data Analysis**

During data analysis, I will create procedures for identifying common meanings from my data. With the interview questions, I will use the technique of textual and structural analysis. Textual analysis refers to the description of *what* is expressed by the participants. Structural analysis states *how* it is expressed by the participants (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). I will use an edited framework proposed by Smith and Osborne (2003) to guide my analysis. The questions are (a) what elements do people unintentionally filter?; and (b) how does the person construct meaning within his or her social and personal world? This will help decipher between explicit information and implicit information. Within phonological analysis, it requires describing and analyzing the *text* to interpret the *context.* The analysis and interpretation should develop into themes that describe descriptions, context, underlining discourse, and individual interpretation and meaning(Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The data within a focus group can be overwhelming. It is important to be able to reduce the data by filtering out irrelevant information that is not aligned to my understanding of the phenomenon (Rabiee, 2004). I will classify information as being irrelevant if it is not directly aligned to me comprehending my phenomenon. Information may also be irrelevant if it cannot be categorized into a theme. This will be discussed later in the analysis. Krueger and Casey (2000) states that the purpose should drive the collection and interpretation of the data. My analysis must be systematic, verifiable, and continuous. With my data collected, I will use the framework purposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) as my analytical process to identify themes within my groups. The stages involve familiarization, identify thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation.

My field notes will be used as an additional layer of data, to be interpreted and analyzed. The field notes will be analyzed alongside the themes that derive from the data. I will look for commonalties with themes in the interview, focus group, or the setting compared to my field notes. I will use my field notes to explain the feelings and experiences that the data is displaying. The field notes can be useful in subsequent analyses including secondary analyses (Creswell, 2013).

In summary, a phenomenological design will provide me the opportunity to gain a deeper perspective, from a teacher’s point of view, why the use of EBPs are not part of their teaching pedagogy. This framework will get to the root of my phenomenon. It will help uncover any bias or feelings the teacher might have towards students with LD, personal experiences in the classroom, commitment to student learning, and individual teaching craft.

**Good start here Jason – obviously there are still some significant holes but that is to be expected at this stage. I am not too worried about that you won’t get to them – but you will want to make sure that you do so that you can have a very fluid and clear plan of action to conduct your research. I won’t re-say the feedback – but you do want to be careful on your writing – and make sure you are re-reading and see the logic and flow as well.**

**Overall – good work – and a strong foundation for your dissertation plans.**

**Dr.B
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