

The Phenomenological Approach in Teaching

Dmitriy Popov

Yaroslavl State University
Yaroslavl, Russia

E-mail: popovdник@gmail.com

Svetlana Kudryashova

Industrial University of Tyumen
Tyumen, Russia

E-mail: kudryashova1977@gmail.com

Vladimir Sokol

Tumen State University
Yekaterinburg, Russia

E-mail: vladimirbsokol@gmail.com

Abstract—Being one of the leading philosophical directions, phenomenology offers an approach for various scientific scopes to benefit from. Among these scopes, education and teaching constitute the most important ones. The phenomenological approach in teaching is widely applied in different educational spheres and in different countries. An analysis of this approach reveals a variety of contributing phenomenological schools. The paper also emphasizes the relevance and potential attainability of a unified basis for this approach.

Keywords—the phenomenological approach; teaching; rationality; personalization; conscious experiences

I. INTRODUCTION

Social philosophy comprises four principal approaches. The naturalistic approach defines the following as the main criteria for the development of the society: demographic increase, standards of life, average human lifespan, maternal and infant mortality, state of health. The idealistic approach focuses on the ethical and moral cultural levels. The activity-oriented approach assigns the top value to the scientific and technical progress represented by the amount of scientific discoveries, inventions, and cutting-edge technologies. The phenomenological approach is much more complicated, though being the trendiest and the most innovative discourse. As its main criterion, we may consider the people's ability to grasp senses. And this is directly connected to the institution of education and teaching process.

According to the Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, phenomenology studies the structures of various conscious experiences, such as perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, volition, and bodily awareness, social and linguistic activities [1]. Phenomenology liberates the conscious experience from its interpretations based on everyday habits, patterns, reasons. Phenomenologists tend to hear words and expressions going beyond any denomination, role, community or organizational identity. In this space, which was put into brackets, they get access to direct meanings.

In XXI century, the phenomenological approach in teaching has become widespread and is now applied in various educational spheres.

II. TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

In Germany, the modern philosopher J. Schmucker-Hartman developed his "philosophical didactics" with an idea of teaching, which focuses on the consciousness transformation: "Every person has philosophical abilities, and thus teaching philosophy consists in a skill to reveal these abilities in an individual. This is the essence of a philosopher as a mentor". [2] Learning is based on understanding oneself as a part of existence, which begins with students' realization of their level of self-consciousness — their "personal horizons". The world outlook deepens due to the detection of an occasional and limited character of the natural attitude appropriate for an ordinary consciousness. Philosophizing leads to cognizing more complicated structures. These ideas of "philosophical didactics" were implemented in Russia by V. B. Sokol [3]. He divided teaching into three stages. The initial is an infant stage where teenagers "are to be protected from excessive skepticism, destructive nihilism, which risks degenerating to a blunt cynicism towards knowledge holders, i.e. teachers, educators, parents" [4]. The middle level represents filling minds with a ready-made knowledge. Higher education is "substantially different from secondary education due to its focus on a reasonable analysis of the knowledge received, thus overcoming a narrow, one-dimensional, dualistic rational (mental) cognition" [5]. The method was approved by a series of lessons also split into several stages. The initial lessons are organized for students to realize the limited potential of thinking, its one-dimensionality, matrix structure, duality, self-deception, illusiveness, etc. Further, the features of rational thinking are studied to help students detect errors, contradictions, and methods to overcome them. The next lessons involve an intellectual multifunctional work. Such training provides the person with the qualification to apply the reflection method and the platform to form a holistic consciousness.

There also exist researches devoted to methods of teaching phenomenological practices. For example, J. Quay (Germany), basing on his experience and M. Heidegger's works, reveals the key points in teaching how to enter the phenomenological attitude [6]. Entering the phenomenological attitude and carrying out the phenomenological reduction cannot be realized in a short period of time through a mechanic technique. Entering phenomenology is compared to jumping into the swimming pool at the swimming lesson. Here we observe a switch to real experiences. One cannot learn to swim via reading books. This jump consists in understanding that there is another way of perception. Discerning a conscious experience constitutes this very jump, which results in differentiating two types of thinking. The first type of thinking is calculating and scientific. It is a single-direction thinking dominated by the discourse, as its starting point is the region of things in this world, i.e., the natural attitude. The second type of thinking is meditative, phenomenological, and meaning-contemplating. The meditative thinking is concerned with holistic all-penetrating meanings, which form phenomenological conceptions and are not available without the phenomenological reduction. An example of such conception is Heidegger's "care" or "event". Actively using this approach to form phenomenological conceptions, Heidegger eventually concluded that a new language could not be created. Instead, he admitted the need of the phenomenological "destruction" — a critical process when traditional conceptions previously used deconstruct to their original sources. The phenomenological destruction means understanding conceptions as phenomenological and not scientific, since they deal with the content of direct conscious experiences, i.e., phenomenological ones. Hence, phenomenological thinking constitutes forming and destructing conceptions, which begin with a "jump" into the phenomenological attitude.

Clark Moustakas, an American phenomenologist, developed a methodology to reach the phenomenological attitude, based on H.-G. Gadamer's hermeneutics. [7] He inspired his students to practice self-consciousness and explore their thinking, meaning- and identity-formation processes. To penetrate into the essence of an experience, he offered the following methodology: to calm down, listen to and purify consciousness, concentrate upon the target question and the person connected to it (including oneself), describe the experience, detect the invariant and main points, discover a potential meaning and penetrate into the essence of the experience.

Shaun Gallagher and Denis Francesconi, American and Italian scientists, respectively, wrote an article devoted to teaching phenomenology, which is considered as expanding our world outlook [8]. As phenomenology emphasizes the intentionality of consciousness, it concerns our relationships with the world. It is essentially important for teachers and students to realize and take responsibility for their world views. Phenomenology offers teachers a way to represent their personal views of the world and their relationships with the things of this world. The reason, inevitably dynamic,

depends on our self-consciousness, knowledge, and the role a subject plays in the cognitive process. Thus, phenomenology constitutes an improved method of concern for our consciousness.

III. ARTS

Professor Joseph Smith, USA, reasoning from his pedagogical practice, proved the efficiency of phenomenology for the formation of musical thinking on the basis of conscious experiences [9]. At the beginning, the teacher instills in students a feeling of live music without loading the musical composition with facts, which artificially engage the live musical experience. Following the stages of the phenomenological reduction, students penetrate through the shell of abstract ideas into a "pure musical consciousness". Meanings are formed top-down, from personally experiencing music to designating it with notes and describing verbally.

Works of an American scientist James Magrini also deserve attention [10]. He uses Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology to develop students' creative imagination and overcome the corporatism and standardization in higher educational institutions. The university is considered as a personal "home" space in contrast to modern views influenced by the ideology of social efficiency. G. Bachelard's phenomenology supposes that the experiences people undergo at their first home, remain with them for the rest of their lives, forming their thinking and memory algorithms. This "home" space cannot be arranged either in a traditional class, or cyberspaces and so-called "virtual" educational communities, which are propelled in standardized and instrumentalist scientific approaches to develop the syllabus. The true teaching is realizable only in the space of the person's subjective transcendence and trans-subjective interpersonal relationships. The "home" space should not be reduced to "proximity" connected to the three-dimensionality of the Cartesian space. It is closely linked to the spirituality feeling, creative intuition and intangible ontological aspects of our existence, which remain elusive, hidden from empirical research methods, but become accessible via phenomenological practices. G. Bachelard's phenomenology enables the university space, which makes students think, imagine and live in the space beyond the four walls of the class-room, and awakens their transcendence through poetic images. In this space students learn to change their Being and world outlook. The changes, however, do not happen via psychological or cognitive theoretical explanations, formal and traditional aesthetic criticism, a scientific method of metacognitive strategies. For G. Bachelard, such conceptual approaches cannot enter the most authentic aspects of our Being. Education lies in the human transcendence and in different ways of authentic "poetic" empathy, for example, for a child's loneliness, where we can also return, if we approach the poets and their poetry. The poetry provides us with an authentic education, as its images teach to be open-minded and able to gather all the shades of meanings using our imagination, which deepens and unites the whole world into a simple image.

IV. CRITICAL THINKING

Thomas Conklin, an American phenomenologist, notes that teaching should bring people to a new level to solve their problems [11]. The consciousness shift to a new level consists in adopting the phenomenological attitude. Learning begins with a doubt, uncertainty in the knowledge we used to consider self-evident. But nowadays in teaching the balance between the statement and reflection is significantly displaced to the former. T. Conklin underlines the need for the phenomenological attitude and quotes cases from both everyday life and professional teaching connected to students' work assessment. He reveals the problem of the academic structure formalizing and limiting teacher-student interactions. To analyze experiences, T. Conklin mainly grounds on M. Merleau-Ponty's works. A special reflexive attitude is also required for training leaders, administrators and managers to enable their flexible decision-making. However, doubts and trials to artificially differentiate experiences can be "epistemologically inappropriate", according to the Dutch phenomenologist H. Spiegelberg [12]. This statement is worth accepting, since another aspect of the phenomenological experience is a "clear understanding" and obviousness. The reduction of phenomenology to doubting means limiting it.

T. Conklin states that the modern traditional routine lifestyle makes people focus on a superficial perception of their relationships. An inability to see Another's uniqueness and a lack of humanity deprive the modern society of the possibility to reveal people's best. Understanding my own consciousness serving as an intermediate between me and another is here the main clue.

V. COMMUNICATIONS

To phenomenologically teach students to build communications, Sharon K. Gibson and Lisa A. Hanes, human resource development (HRD) researchers, worked out the following algorithm: a) to be open, perceptible, and sensitive; b) to keep away from judging Another; c) to meet Another with the attitude of "I and Thou" (M. Buber), as a fulfilled independent individual with personal conscious experiences; d) to open a direct communication promoting mutual trust and openness; e) to penetrate into Another's uniqueness, understanding specific traits and a correlation of biographic events as means of realizing the essence of Another's experience [13]. It is also important to take into account the limited potential of the human consciousness. This approach relates to H.-G. Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology.

Carol Thomson, South Africa, uses hermeneutic phenomenology to develop teacher-student relationships [14]. The research concerns, in particular, an objective assessment of students' works. It becomes especially relevant in the case of a very widespread nowadays distant learning, where the teacher is deprived of the possibility to directly communicate with students. In spite of the problems and challenges intrinsic to the modern higher education, phenomenology possesses a great potential, since live personal experiences are the top priorities with it. Penetrating

into the direct conscious experience is used to solve the problems of discrimination, educational disparities and social injustice. Phenomenology can awaken new ideas, such as humanity, compassion, critical reflection and socio-political responsibility, which are to become the very texture of the pedagogical education. As C. Thomson concludes, "To do less is to compromise quality teaching and learning, social transformation and our own humanity" [15].

S. Kudryashova, a Russian researcher developing the translator's competence model, phenomenologically interprets the teaching competence-oriented approach as person-oriented, the personal competence serving as the basis and not as a model component [16]. The communicative competence is the main and unique connecting element in the model. Its integrative function enables the transformation of professional skills into competences and, as a long-term goal, a developed commitment to self-realization and realization of professional activities as a personal characteristic. The competence-oriented methodology is meaning-oriented, taking into account an individual communicative potential in its neurophysiological, psychological and philosophical aspects. The teacher is responsible for creating and supporting a special learning environment characterized as positive, integrative, developing, challenging, cooperative, technological, personally and professionally relevant, structured and meaning-oriented.

VI. INTEGRATIVE EDUCATION

Researches of W. Küpers, a German and New Zealand scientist, employ the phenomenological and integrative approaches to study educational institution functioning [17]. In this work, "methodologically advanced" phenomenology and the integrative approach are applied to realize a thorough analysis and relational understanding of education in institutions. An "advanced" phenomenology is represented by M. Merleau-Ponty's post-Husserlean phenomenology emphasizing a bodily character of experience. According to this approach, learning should arise to its life experience, which means turning to the world embodying the act of cognition always highlighted by knowledge. To the world, in relation to which any scientific schematization is an abstract and derived sign language. Thus, all the knowledge being learnt always undergoes a live process of embodiment. It is not only that we know more than we can tell concerning our preliminary understanding of phenomena, but we are also plunged into the world of experience, where a live phenomenon always matters more than a known one. Our live body and embodiment in the social context constitute our situation, our knowledge, our life. Apart from this, the whole learning process takes place within the institutionalized infrastructural attitude as kind of system or context embodiment. The live body is an intermediate between inside and outside, subjective and objective, individual and social experience and meaning of learning. The process of live and social embodiment is mediated by the body and coordinates relations between an individual behavior, social relationships, artefacts and institutions via a language and communication. The embodied status of a

bodily subject and social embodiment paves the way to a personal phenomenological description of students and education in institutions.

Relational learning is a practice, which allows students and teachers to build a dialogue in the course of learning, deconstruct the hierarchy in the teaching-learning relationships and create together the learning space both in and out of class. This learning involves inside and outside, individual and social measures connected to an interdependent interaction, developmental context and integrative cycle. This approach promotes the embodiment of a non-reductionist, integrative and relational understanding in educational institutions. The integrative cycle comprises four educational spheres. The sphere of consciousness (1) requires cultivating self-observation, reflexive and contemplating practices to increase self-consciousness, concentration, self-control, curiosity and open-mindedness to enhance the personal transformation. The sphere of behavior (2) involves specific trainings, competence- and skill-building, including open-air exercises and other forms of empirical training. The basis of the sphere of culture (3) is formed by cultivating team relationship learning and analyzing the links between education and cultural changes. In particular, social activities constitute a connecting link between individual and social, a student and an organization. Finally, the sphere of system (4) comprises analyzing obstacles and limits in reorganization of functional structures and working process, as well as in redistribution of resources or transformation of institutional systems. This sphere can also involve information and communication technologies supporting the learning process, for example, multi-media and computer skills development. From the standpoint of psychophysical, body-oriented subjectivity, this integrative phenomenological approach provides a unified empirical language ground to integrate and interpret results from different sources presented in different levels of complexity. The integrative and relation-oriented methodology can be useful for the deconstruction of single-direction and fragmentary teaching approaches.

VII. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Joanne Nazir, a Canadian specialist in environmental education, used phenomenology for researches in this scope [18]. As in environmental education the pragmatic approach discredit itself, there is a need in a more profound and multileveled methodology. Phenomenology with its open philosophical base can provide new answers for questions asked by environmental education researchers. However, its application requires from researchers to take a flexible philosophical position in comparison with other more widely used research methodologies. This flexible position expects researchers to “be phenomenological”, which means to accept fundamental ontological and epistemological ideas appropriate for phenomenology. A “scientific” person’s attitude, by its origin, grounds researchers in the natural attitude of being objective, reductionist and suspicious towards non-empirical data.

Phenomenological researches in environmental education resulted in a new direction called eco-phenomenology. The

American scientists Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine originated it with their book “Eco-phenomenology: Back to the earth itself” [19]. Eco-phenomenology as a phenomenological direction coming from M. Heidegger and M. Merleau-Ponty expands the existential approach to all of the Earth’s elements and insists on researchers’ applying it to study environmental issues. It purifies the human thinking from opposing to the nature and enhances an existential connection between People and the Earth. By this, eco-phenomenology discovers and develops an access to the Nature and essence, which do not depend on the conceptuality of natural science and traditional metaphysics. Phillip G. Payne, an Australian scientist, analyzed the application of the phenomenological approach to environmental education [20]. Those who are engaged in environmental education can promote an eco-centric view of the educational experience to solve the problem of an interdisciplinary theorizing on experiences. Eco-centric education is realized through an aesthetic description of experiencing the nature as a connecting basis of life in modern social context. Environmental approaches still remain on the periphery, taking existential, post-modernistic and socially critical positions. From the eco-phenomenological standpoint, educational problems cannot be solved through positivistic methodologies. The approaches, which are more popular in educational research, divide body-mind and I-world into separate entities. This stable Cartesian thinking hampers the practical conceptual development of trans-disciplinary co-aesthetics and eco-policy of educational experience, conceptualization, contextualization of their views and legitimacy of means and goals in environmental education and its investigation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

As we can see from the above overview devoted to the global experience of applying the phenomenological approach in teaching, phenomenology has rooted in a variety of scopes. Lester Embree, USA, highlights this fact in his article touching upon the interdisciplinarity of phenomenology [21]. The author states that within a century phenomenology as a tradition has become multidisciplinary and philosophers are not the only to study it. Thus, it is time to consider especially relevant such issues as “disciplinary tolerance” and deepening a dialogue between different phenomenological directions with the aim to clarify the terminology database and common grounds. An interdisciplinary meeting is like a journey into a remote land. At first, one often faces with difficulties and inconveniences, including strange and unexpected events and even a cultural shock. But, eventually, the traveler will be rewarded.

Having analyzed the available phenomenological directions in teaching, we can conclude that they all have an integrative ground, though each being limited by its scope. M. Merleau-Ponty’s body-oriented phenomenology emphasizes the psychophysical region of a conscious experience, neglecting the cultural and historical aspect. H.-G. Gadamer’s hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the linguistic and psychological region of a conscious experience, but introduces notional ambiguity, relativity and

detachment from a direct experience. M. Heidegger's phenomenology arises to the rational intuition and existence of the essential region of a conscious experience, facing the challenges to realize an inter-subjective interaction and create the phenomenological language. All these phenomenological directions in teaching introduce important differentiations of conscious experiences, but only within their regions of thinking. Different conscious experiences being independent, the personal holistic consciousness cannot form on the basis of the intentional region, which Husserl considered as the main target and appealed to. Husserl reasonably disapproved of this eclecticism of his disciples' approaches, as it was mentioned by Spiegelberg [22]. However, if an emphasis is made on the intentional aspect of the phenomenological approach to teaching and the formation of the holistic consciousness, if appropriate pedagogical technologies are also introduced, this will result in developing complex competences, as follows:

- Overcoming the scientific discourse and reaching the interdisciplinary stage,
- Integrity of perception and problem-solving on another, higher level,
- Eco-centric world outlook,
- Mutual correction in communication,
- Discerning the boundaries of the cultural discourse and developing a cross-cultural dialogue,
- Discerning existential embodiment in the social context (identity, patriotism),
- Discerning non-empirical aspects of creative intuition and spirituality [23].

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