ANALYZING PROBLEM EXPLICATION AND A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING CATEGORIES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE COUNSELLING PROCESS

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Summary

The purpose of this paper is to analyze advice to teachers and other professionals working with students when they are in challenging situations. Such situations will affect both personal and situation-specific factors which may be difficult to describe properly. Many factors might be difficult to explain and describe in a brief text. This paper is based on a methodical analysis of questions and answers that are presented on the site. Text analysis is used as research method supplemented by terms retrieved from grounded theory. We have therefore chosen to study some factors which affect the following:

1. Problem explication
How to describe the problem of the counselee and why he/she seeks guidance?
What kind of problems does the user asks guidance?
- Is it information / knowledge the counselee demands?
- Is it reflection on practical challenges he requires?
  - *Is it individual personal problems he or she presents?*
      - Is it educational-methodological support that he/she requires?
      - Is it a need for "the right solution" - normative expectations?
      - Other matters?

At the starting point it is what the counselee has defined in her/her written questions that determine the dynamics of online counselling. The net-counsellor builds his advice on the problem explication.

2. Adviser categories
How to interpret advisers / coaches problem descriptions posted on the Web - the development and application of a model for analyzes? Problem description posted on the website is usually characterized of the three main elements:
- Counselee explains how the student and the situation are perceived
- Counselee specifies which kind of relationship he/she has to the problem. It is the counselee's self perception that is the basis for this assessment.
- Counselee demands knowledge and information.
Consequences for the advice will be to increase provides explanations counsellor will not mean as much for problem solution. There is to a greater extent the counselee's questions not being set, which will provide the basis for advice. The description of the teacher's personal experience of the problem has in addition significance for the personal-oriented counselling and support.

Introduction

This paper is based upon an action research project that aims at implementing blended learning as a tool for practical problem solving in basic education in Norway and Germany. Leuphana University (DE) and Bodoe University College (NO) are partners in the project. The project concerns professional counselling, by establishing a new teachers' forum, an internet-based resource centre for practical problem-solving. The internet-forum is built on a simple principle; the teacher is asking questions and in return acquires various answers. Teachers' questions are based on their own definitions of a practical problem, experienced "here and now".

This forum is in addition a contribution towards developing (the) school as a learning organization. It will help to strengthen student-teachers' competences in obtaining help - and themselves giving help - by the use of modern communication. The resource centre shall to a great extent contribute to the wider development of guidance service and teacher training by establishing this professional net service for teachers in basic training. To attain this, our intention as well is to contribute to the school's learning-culture by putting into practice the principles within "blended learning" (Valiathan 2002).

The framework of this research has a philosophical and epistemological foundation in phenomenology as an approach and understanding attributed to Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) and his works from 1890's and forward (Molander 1993, Gadamer 1997). One of the main theses is that man has learned to experience the world through phenomena. The source of knowledge is thus the phenomenon as it turns out. An ideal is to liberate oneself from a theoretical pre-understanding going next to the "matter". Ponty (1908 - 1961) asserts, however, that we, in order to capture a phenomenon, must liberate from the understanding of an "objective" world, and recognize that we know the world as we experience it - Husserl introduced the term *"life-world"* that involves the recognition that we can not catch a description of an objective reality, but only as the human experience of the fenomenon.

Husserl's understanding of "life world" is both similar, naive everyday perceptions and expectations about the future. Husserl also uses the term *"intension"* as man seeks to give all that is experienced a meaning. Husserl argues that human beings do not act out of an objective reality, but from his understanding of the meaning in a situation. A third concept that Husserl introduced was *"essence"*. The concept is based on the theory of intensions and implies that there is a core of meaning and content related to experience, which varies from individual to individual, which at the same time is common to all people (Molander 1993).

Theoretical framework

Constructing knowledge occurs both as an individual and as a social process. The personal acquisition of knowledge happens whenever an individual interprets another's utterance. Knowledge is not "transferred" unaltered from one individual to another, but is mediated, and constructed anew by the recipient. Mason claims that successful online-based learning must build upon a constructivist theory of knowledge (Mason 2003, Imsen 1998, Lund 2005). An assertion will, according to constructivist theory, be interpreted in accordance with the background of an individual's understanding of the topic, and will be taken into the individual recipient's system of concepts. Sorensen asserts that any pedagogical design, including designs of online learning, implies a latent and sometimes unconscious theoretical perspective on learning. She emphases the meaning of the fact that the underlying theoretical understanding needs to be brought up to the level at which we can make a conscious deliberate choice of ways of approach.

A *social constructivist* approach to learning understands it as a process between people. Vygotskij claims that "learning happens when the culture is incorporated within the person" (Bråthen 1996). A constructivist perspective implies that knowledge is not something of a given size, but something that is constructed in a meeting between people, with language as the medium. The social-constructivist approach emphasises that construction of knowledge is not an individual but a collective process, with language as the bearer of the collective understanding (Imsen 1998, Lund 2005).

Research problem and questions
The initial discussion leads to the following question: *How does counselee describe and explain teacher's own practice in questions directed to Teachers' Forum*. Presenting issues like questions to get information, asking for advice, or as more open questions for reflection in practice.

Methodology
Phenomenology is a living methodology and a dynamic inquiry. Exploring the boundaries of its disciplines is a convergence of phenomenological insight. This convergence stimulates many questions, some of which we will discuss during this paper: Which main elements in phenomenological inquiry do we recognize doing a limited research on teachers' experiences? How does phenomenology contribute to a better understanding of teachers' different practices? And how can we renew and expand phenomenology? First and foremost, we believe, by letting the classic texts written by the primary sources influence our thinking and writing. Through reading and rereading the research texts carefully we should strive toward making original and profound contributions to phenomenological practice and research. (Straumsheim 2009)

Embree (2006 p 19) defines phenomenology like this: "Phenomenology is about how a phenomenon is perceived for us from a first person perspective". With such an understanding of a phenomena presented by counselee in the teacher forum, it is especially one issue we are interested in getting more knowledge about, whether counselee perceive their own role as a relevant and important part of a problem description. If the actor's own role is not mentioned in the issue, it could be seen as irrelevant for the current problem situation. On this basis, we want to find out if the teachers who send questions to "Teacher's Forum" explicitly describe the problem and his own role facing the phenomenon that he is looking an advice for.

There are two reasons why we find this issue interesting. A central aspect of a phenomenological understanding is that people is not seen as neutral in perceiving the world. Man is also a part of this world in collaboration with it (Hiim & Hippe 1998). A pedagogical justification for asking the question is that in the legislation and key guidelines for schools seeking to implement a clearer perspective on school system operations. (Imsen 2000). This perspective implies that we have an interactive view of students' training. A problem in students' learning situation is not only a problem of students, but rather the interaction between the student and the learning conditions that the school has managed to create. How a teacher chooses to formulate a problem might possibly tell whether the current focus is upon the student as an individual, or the interaction between the student and the learning environment.

Methods of data analysis
The research evidence we have used is taken from documents submitted to the Teacher's Forum. In Teacher's Forum we can find apportioned questions within nine relevant areas. We chose the last two messages in each of these areas, totally 18 messages. The purpose is to develop analytical categories. In the process of developing categories we make an analysis of the text itself, with repeated read-through, in order to make a classification of the meaning-unit level. We build on the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1970, Strauss & Corbin 1990) from abduction (Blaikie 2000) hermeneutic (Gadamer

1997, Guneriussen 1996) and from general principles of qualitative analysis (Kvale 1997).

This analysis involves a process of exchange between the meanings of an overall rating of the text down to the unit level. A "rating unit" is understood as a statement that in itself expresses a meaningful content which makes sense to the reader. Sometimes this may be a sentence, sometimes a part of a sentence and sometimes a device consisting of several sentences. Each rating unit is given a code (se table 1) that describes the function of the device in the text. Such an approach implies that several statements of the same category may be found in the same message.

Analysis of the research-material passes through a process of three phases; *open coding, axial coding* and *selective coding* (Glaser & Strauss 1967).The phases can be defined as: Open coding is the stage where you identify and designate the phenomena that exist in the text. These phenomena may be concrete objects and activities, but they can in addition be phenomena of an abstract level as relations, organizational size and properties of these. Axial coding as phase two in the process is to identify relationships between the phenomena that are described in the first phase. Selective coding is the last phase choosing the core categories, relating them to the other categories (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Example - *open coding* – (symbols see table 1). Case sent to "Teachers Forum".

I work at a small school having a 13 year old pupil (8.class). (code-ip), he is struggling with conceptual understanding, doing many things but not learning that much. He often needs further explanation of the tasks. He has a concentration problem, needing careful follow-up by the teacher getting things done. He is somewhat confused and does not know which book he should work with. The boy has a childlike language, preferring to play with younger children. The student is struggling with learning the letters (sounds), and some of these are not properly learned so the pupil gets special speech help. (code-dp) He has a long medical history. (code-ip) When he feels his workload unreasonable , he fails to eat. (code-dp) He has a father with mental problems. His mother is very clever following up her son, cooperating very well with the school. (code-ip) The student has the role of "the Class Clown" creating much unrest. Peers often make fun of him, but he seems to perceive this experience as positive attention. There seems a lack of social antennas. (Code-dp) This boy, however, also has many positive skills. He is very polite and helpful and clever at giving other nice comments. (code-ip) As we can see, the teachers experience many challenges with this student. (code-or) And now I'm wondering how I can act? (code-ra)

Table 1 summarizes the results of coding based on eighteen similar texts.

Results

In this section we will give a presentation of the ten different categories we have been "washing out" from the texts by a "step-by-step" procedure described above. The categories are presented and ranked in ascending order of occurrence in the texts. We want to express something about the occurrence of the different categories developing a model in making it easier to interpret needs and the understanding of counselee. This section concludes with a general   comment   on   the   findings.

It is important that the advisor can determine which type of questions asked without conducting a detailed analysis of code each time a new issue is posted on the web. The design of the counsellor's response will depend on problem analysis and problem perception through analysis. The results of the analysis presented in this article shows that the problem explication of the counselee includes the following categories, or indicators: The six most useful categories constitute 129 of a total of 151 meaning units. This represents 85.4% of the total number of meaning units. This means that the model we use will include the following main categories:

Categories ranked (open coding)	Axial coding	Selective coding- meaning devices

1. Information about the problem (ip)	Ip - 43	Explanation
2. Description of the problem (dp)	Dp- 36	Explanation
3. Request for advice (ra)	Ra- 17	Questioning
4. Presentation of own position (ps)	Ps- 13	Position
5. Description of own role (do)	Do- 10	Position / relationship
6. Information on self-experience problem (is)	Is - 10	Explanation
7. Critiques of their own role (or)	Or - 8	Position/selfunderstanding
8. Invitation to reflection (ir)	Ir - 7	Questioning
9. Request for information (ri)	Ri - 5	Questioning
10.Counselee reviews (rr)	Rr - 2	Posisjon/evaluation

Table 1: Profile based on analyzing 18 problem descriptions like the example above.

Discussion

Studying online communication, one has to reflect which differences it pose not to talk face - to - face. Vetlesen (2003) refers to Habermas` distinction between the three levels of communication; (1) Linguistic expression. (2) Actions as companion or successor of linguistic expression. (3) Expression through the body, mimicry and gestures.

The same type of statements, for example problem description, information and questions could occur several times in the same message. Some of the messages contain very complex issues. Two aspects are emphasized heavily in the material: a) Describing students' problems and difficult situations and b) presenting the background of the student. This background is usually the student himself and family. The school as a learning organization is usually not included in this information. Statements pertaining to the school's own contributions and descriptions of their own complicity emerge far less frequently. Only one half of these statements reflect a critical perspective on their own practice.

Such an analysis provides absolutely no basis for drawing the conclusion that one perspective is seen as more important than another. However we believe there is reason to ask if this distribution may tell us something about how a problem situation is perceived and interpreted. Is this perceived as a problem only belonging to the student, or is this perceived as a problem encountered by the school's interaction with the student? (Imsen 2000).

Another distinction made in the analysis is to look for what the teachers who have posted questions demand. Do they ask for information on legislation, for advice or do they invite to reflection? We can see that the majority ask for advice; "May someone give me advice what to do now ..? In fourteen of eighteen messages, we find statements requesting advice, whereas invitation to reflection occurs to less extent.

Implicit in the phenomenological understanding, one recognizes that each individual has their own perception of reality. Categorization the answers into a few clearly made patterns in itself carries a risk of undermining the understanding that every experience is unique. However, if we return to Husserl's term "Essence", meaning and content of the individual relating to the experience is unique - but not detached from the common view. Something might be considered a collective, cultural ownership. (Molander 1993) Therefore, I consider it as just, even within a phenomenological approach to categorize and simplify the research material in order to see whether any common patterns come forward contributing to new understanding.

Based on the material we have analyzed, we will ask some critical questions. We chose to focus on the teachers' own need for advice. The findings, in the selected material shows that the emphasis is on describing the pupils' problems rather than to raise questions of personal teaching strategies and school's role,. Can this be related to the tendency in the analysed material that teachers increasingly are requesting for methods rather than asking questions for reflection? It is also appropriate to ask whether such a tendency would appear the same in a face-to-face-guidance (Sorensen 2003).

Moreover, the very process of categorizing the texts, finding patterns and relationships, gives the idea that a systematic analysis can help providing tools for the advisor. The

analysis has so far shown that it makes sense to look for patterns and structures in the texts related to the position of the 18 cases. Having a set category to start with can be a support for the advisor. Such an approach should be balanced against the understanding based on phenomenology that each experience is unique. We are returning to Husserl's term "life-world", which implies that the phenomena can not be described in an objective valid way, but only as individual human experiences. As Husserl points out, through his concept of "essence" there is a core of meaning and content that can be communicated between people. Our analyses of the text should not be understood as an objectively "correct" categorization. Perhaps a system like this, however, in cooperation between counselee, coaches and scientists, should lead to develop a tool that can contribute to better supervision and counselling, and thereby contribute to better learning.

We can reflect problems on several levels for further work. The research ideal within a phenomenological approach, to present the players' world rather than interpreting it, entails, as we see it, a major challenge. It appears a major task to "make themselves aware of their own pre-understanding and then putting it aside".

Conclusion
The purpose of the analysis is to increase our understanding of the problem statements posted, and to develop a model for problem analysis. This model is conceptualized as shown in table 2. The model is constructed to give different directions for counselling.

Categories grouped	Function	Counselling
Information about the problem	Explanation **89**	Knowledge building
Description of the problem		
Information about his/her experience of the problem		
Information about counselee	Personal experience of the problem **33**	Personal support
Information about teacher's role		
Critique of their own role		
Counselee reviews		
Request for advice	Questioning **29**	Professional guidance needs
Invitation to reflection		
Request for information		

Table 2. Model based on selective analyses/evaluation

Problem description posted on the website is usually characterized of the three main elements:
- Counselee explains how the student and the situation are perceived
- Counselee specifies which kind of relationship he/she has to the problem. It is the counselee's self perception that is the basis for this assessment.
- Counselee demands knowledge and information.
Consequences for the advice will be to increase provides explanations counsellor will not mean as much for problem solution. There is to a greater extent the counselee's questions not being set, which will provide the basis for advice. The description of the teacher's personal experience of the problem has in addition significance for the personal-oriented counselling and support.

Written guidance related to the problematic situations is particularly demanding when the communication occurs through the open net. There will be a need to develop clear models for such guidance having limits to the detailed issues that can be explained and how deep the analysis can go. We have through this text analysis developed a tentative model for problem explication and problem analysis. It is now under trial having so far identified ten indicators that are categorized in tree overall concepts. The categories identify the main concepts of analysing problems and provide direction for the advice.

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