



Phenomenology of Practice: A Valuable Way to Gain Pathic Knowledge in Medical Education

Hakimeh Sabeghi¹, Leila Afshar², Shahram Yazdani^{3*}

1. Assistant Professor, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Birjand University of Medical Sciences, Birjand, Iran

2. Associate Professor, Department of Medical Ethics, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

3. Professor, Virtual School of Medical Education and Management, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

Received: 18.10.2020

Accepted: 27.03.2022

Published online: 20.03.2022

***Corresponding Author:**

Shahram Yazdani

Email:

shahram.yazdani@yahoo.com

Citation:

Sabeghi H, Afshar L, Yazdani Sh. Phenomenology of practice: A valuable way to gain pathic knowledge in medical education. J Qual Res Health Sci. 2022; 11(1):58-60.

Abstract

Phenomenology of practice is a useful method for deeply understanding human phenomena and is fundamentally practical. Its ultimate goal is to nurture thoughtfulness and tact in the practice of professions. Pathic knowledge is a type of non-cognitive knowledge which is obtained through phenomenology of practice and can provide a lens for teachers and students to reflect on their teaching and learning experiences through their relationships, their situations, and their acts. From Van Manen's point of view, what distinguishes practice from theory is not that practice exerts thought and concepts in the real world; rather, phenomenology of practice involves a different path of recognizing the world. It is very important in medical education due to the importance of communication and human interactions. In this letter, the author highlighted the importance of pathic knowledge in medical education as a part of professional knowledge.

Keywords: Phenomenology of practice, Pathic knowledge, Medical education

Dear Editor

Medical education research is a rigorous and systematic project planned to answer the basic questions of medical educators to help them make educational decisions (1). Phenomenology is one of the qualitative research methods that describe human perceptions of their experiences in dealing with a variety of phenomena (2) which has been used in various studies in medical sciences (3-5).

According to van Manen, phenomenology is a project of conscious reflection on the lived experience of human life that should be thoughtful and free from theoretical, prejudicial, and hypothetical intoxications (6). In his view,

phenomenological research is oriented to practice and is a kind of life practice. He wrote at the beginning of his book, *Phenomenology of Practice* that this book is a starting point of openness to "phenomenologies of lived meaning, the meaning of meaning, and the originary sources of meaning" (7). In other words, we are always looking for meaning and pose questions about how to act in our everyday relationships, which Van Manen calls pragmatic approach "phenomenology of practice" (8).

Phenomenology of practice helps researchers to understand human phenomena deeply. Its terminal goal is to foster insight and tact in the practice



of professions (9); therefore, it can be applied in various professional fields such as medical education where human relations predominate.

From Van Manen's point of view, what differentiates practice from theory is not that practice exerts ideas and concepts in the real world; rather, phenomenology of practice presents a distinct path of recognizing the world. While theory "thinks" about the world, practice "grasp" it through dynamic approaches and pathic ways. The ways which lead to understanding in this method are not mystical, cognitive, intellectual, or technical; but, they are pathic i.e. relational, situational, physical, temporal, and practical (7, 8). It is difficult to describe pathic knowledge in words because it is directly related to the lived practice of individuals and is manifested through practical activities and experiences of peoples (10), like in the self-confidence we have when doing things, in our emotions, in the climate of a place, and the way we can read someone's face (11).

In the teaching-learning process, pathic knowledge is acquired as a result of interpersonal relationships between teachers, students, and their educational environment, and phenomenology provides philosophical methodological tools that can reveal important aspects of teacher-student interactions and organize the information obtained in the ways that are scientifically proven (11). It is pathic knowledge that helps teachers adapt to professional contexts and the experiential aspects of their professional relationships. The strength of phenomenology of practice is the possibility to reach and reflect on the non-cognitive dimensions of professional performance through pathic concepts. However, it should be noted that describing and interpreting the cognitive aspects of life is much easier than the pathic aspects of the

world. For example, we can easily talk about the architectural features and physical space of an educational institution or classroom, but the discussion about the climate and its emotional and perceptual aspects by learners is very difficult. This is what is being considered in the phenomenology of practice inquiries (8).

The purpose of phenomenology of practice is to develop a "phenomenological text" which describes the lived experience deeply, reflects on its essence, and leads to the understanding of that phenomenon. It is a kind of text which is characterized by valuable and in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon under study, and provides a thoughtful, reflexive, re-living experience for readers through the pathic approaches of knowledge (9). Therefore, in medical education, it provides a special type of knowledge that causes teachers to act with more reflection, tact, and skill in specific educational situations. Furthermore, the phenomenological texts in this method have great educational potential for readers and open new windows in their way of thinking and feeling.

Briefly, the term phenomenology of practice serves "to foster and strengthen an embodied ontology, epistemology, and axiology of a thoughtful and tactful action" (7). One aspect of practical knowledge that is particularly important is Van Manen's concept of pathic knowledge. Pathic knowledge actually sees students in their lifeworld and is a part of professional knowledge; therefore, it is of great significance in medical education regarding the importance of communication and human interactions. In fact, this kind of knowledge helps physicians and other healthcare workers to adapt to the professional situations and understand people's lived experiences deeply.

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