PEDAGOGICAL TEXT AS METHOD: Phenomenological Research As Writing

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Some people speak of method precisely, demandingly; what they want in work is method; to them it seems rigorous enough, formal enough. Method becomes a Law, the inviolable fact that a work which consistently proclaims its will-to-method is ultimately sterile: everything has been put into the method, nothing remains for the writing; the researcher insists that his text will be methodological, but this one never comes; no more way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method. (Bauman, 1986, p. 318)

Although Barthès' pronouncement of method is as provocative as it is eloquent, I am impressed less by his point that research should not be ruled by method than by his derogation that such work tends to lack 'life and fecundity. And with this second point Barthès raises the question of the relation between research and writing. A basic assumption would be that the aim of human science research is to create a living text in a phenomenological sense. And Barthès argue that we are so preoccupied with issues of method that what may really count, the textual practice of writing, is considered of low priority or of little consequence. Almost in a taken-for-granted manner the process of research and writing remain methodologically separated, since to bring about and writing into a close contact he at an intentional relation.

There may be several reasons for this reluctance of fusing the images of researchers and author. Researchers and authors are seen to have different epistemological-loyalties: science in contrast with literature. On the one hand the researcher is a method-person, a low-and-order person, even though most researchers admit that the essence of the research, like what happens behind bedroom doors, is ultimately a passionate and creative affair. The author on the other hand is seen to be a born anarchist, a lover of text, someone who aims to seduce through language, even though the activity of real writing (what Barthès calls "authoring") requires intense discipline. "Yet his more literary discipline is distrusted since it only wishes to follow the fickle vision of the author's genius. In the domain of the human sciences things seem more regulated and more systematic that in the literary domain. The human science researcher is often considered a philosopher-scientist, or someone who has
closely rubbed shoulders with the philosopher. And the philosopher wants to submit to sound logic and rational argument. Research texts that overflow the tight methodological container of strict human science discourse are easily dismissed as excessive, suggestive, subjective, and thus of dubious validity. To the methods-bound researcher such texts look like literature (even though they are not to be confused with literature) and one does not quite know what to do with them.

There exists an interesting precedent to the issue identified by Barthes. During the 1950’s in the Netherlands a certain phenomenological method was practiced by members of the so-called Utrecht School. Some of their writings are still celebrated and mentioned in the literature as classical examples of this tradition. I name a few such as Langeveld’s “The Secret Place of the Child” and “The Thing in the World of the Child,” Bayensdijk’s “The First Smile of the Child;” Van den Berg’s “The Handshake” and “The Sickbed,” and Bollnow’s “The Pedagogical Atmosphere.” These texts were values for their subtle insights, for their compelling vigor in directing our attentiveness to the lived world. their transformative quality, and for their situated pedagogical normativity.

To be sure, not every Dutch contemporary of the exponents of the Utrecht School was admiring of their work. For some, such as Strasser (1963/76), the products of the Utrecht School suffered from a lack of philosophical rigor or sophistication, and thus yielded a soft, impressionistic, and naive form of phenomenology at best. This is how, in a text entitled Ooovondingswetenskap en Ooovondingswijzaard (“Science of Education and Educational Wisdom”) Strasser comments on the Utrecht School scholar:2

...the naive phenomenologist surrenders willingly to impressions which push themselves onto him, and he tries to transform these impressions into words. To the extent that he succeeds he is an impressionist (in the literary sense of this term). If he is alert at all he may be able — at the head of suggestive examples, well-chosen analogies, compellingly arranged factual material — to give the impression to have proven something. In reality he does not prove anything. At the hand of other examples, other analogues, differently arranged factual material a second gifted author would be able to show the opposite. In this manner both impressionists may have provided literary contributions. However, from the point of view of science and philosophy their products are worthless. He who searches for truth in their writings is only the expression of an unbridled subjectivism. (p. 68)

Although it is not my intention to comment extensively on Strasser’s critique, I like to bring it into the view of my discussion of “phenomenological research as writing” since this proposed approach might invite similar reaction. There are without doubt
many issues associated with a phenomenological methodology which attempts to move the point of gravity of the research process toward the very activity of writing itself. Fundamental to the notion of research as writing is the semantic idea that the research text makes a claim to a certain autonomy and further that the text aims at a certain effect in/as dialogic relation to the reader. Of course the philosophic phenomenological aim is at a certain effect as well. From Strasser's point of view the philosophic text probably aims at the cognitive equivalent of "theoretical" or "intellectual truth" that he speaks about (1974, pp. 296-302). But what Strasser does not see or acknowledge is that the texts of scholars such as Langeveld and Bolhors have a pedagogic rather than a philosophic intent. Moreover, Bolhors (1974) points out that even in the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) knowledge is not a matter of theoretical or intellectual truth, or the formal insight alone. But knowledge as understanding is geistig — a matter of the depth of the soul, spirit, embodied knowing and being.

Yet, there is validity to Strasser's critique. A human science which is carried by genius rather than by method runs the risk, if guided by less than genius, of reducing its products into uninspired and undisciplined mush. Langeveld and some of his brilliant colleagues produced finely crafted texts. But the methodological approach inherent in this work was difficult to insinuate or emulate.

By inadvertently hiding their method, or perhaps more accurately, by largely remaining unwilling to reflect methodologically on the reflective nature of their own pedagogic discourses Langeveld and his co-workers kept closed the possibility for others to exercise those same practices. And so there was in this sense perhaps an anti-pedagogic drift to the life of research of the members of the Utrecht School. Only a limited number of exceptional scholars were able to exercise their scholarly membership of the Utrecht School tradition. Possibly as a result of this fact, the tradition was sometimes accused of academic elitism. Only those who possessed a certain genius (insight) for perceiving the subtleties of the pedagogic lifeworld, and who also were able to express and transform these insights into outstanding phenomenological texts, were thereby recognized as privileged "theorist".

The poignancy of this critique is perhaps shown in the fact that with the retirement of Langeveld, Beekman, Voors, Vermeert, and (in Giemans) Bolhors, the Utrecht School seemed to have expired by the late 1960's. The tradition simply lacked generativity. However, in the early 1970's, Beekman, a student of Langeveld, experimented with a practical and down-to-earth approach to phenomenological inquiry into the lifeworlds of children. Beekman's subsequent important contribution to a revival of the Utrecht School, by inventing a "workshop approach" to phenomenological reflection (Beekman and Mulderj, 1977; Bartt, et al, 1984), was
in a way a practical methodological response to the above described predicament. However, Beekman's attempt at democratizing the phenomenological pedagogical tradition suffered perhaps from two failings: (1) the need for a textual or writing practice as an inherent part of the inquiry process was not part of his program; and (2) the normative pedagogical dimension of the work tended to erode as a result of the strong import of ethnographic elements into the inquiry process (see for example the otherwise very interesting "Hilde's Book" by Bernt, Beekman, Bleeker, and Mulderij, 1985). In his dissertation Dienstbaar Beekman (1975) argued that pedagogy is a discipline which ministers to pedagogic practice. The place and emphasis of the normative is somewhat different in the subsequent work of Beekman and his students Bleeker and Mulderij, when the normative is added to the investigative work as some sort of appended advice to policy makers. Beekman aimed at bringing the phenomenological methodology of the Utrecht School within reach of the "average" pedagogic student. Indeed his approach was and remains remarkably successful. And yet, the textual and the hermeneutic pedagogical requirements of this work have not been maximized.

It is only appropriate to make such comments about recent developments if one keeps in mind the original accomplishments of the Utrecht School as exemplified in the work of Langeveld, Bernt, Bolleniew, van den Berg and others. For example, Langeveld's "The Secret Place of the Child" exhibits a textual structure which is still modern and powerful in its effect of prompting the reader to a reflective pedagogic dialogue. What strikes us in the piece is its sustained sense of wonder about the meaning and pedagogic significance of a certain space experience of young children that most adults readily seem to recognize andcollect in Langeveld's interpretive description.

The Notion of "Example"

In his lectures, the Dutch phenomenologist Bayrdendijk once termed phenomenology "the science of examples." With this phrase he was referring to the iconic-qualy of phenomenologi-cal knowledge. A phenomenological study does not describe the nature of a phenomenon in the same sense that, for instance, an ethnographer describes a certain culture. When an ethnographer describes the culture of a teen-center or a day-care environment the description is expected to exhibit a certain degree of reality validity for the way this particular youth culture or that particular day-care setting is experienced by these young people or children. In contrast, phenomenological research as it has been approached in this text aims at
eliciting those phenomenological structural features of a phenomenon that help to make visible, as it were, that which constitutes the nature or essence of the phenomenon. In other words, every phenomenological description is in a sense only an example, an icon that points at the "thing" which we attempt to describe. A phenomenological description describes the original of which the description is only an example. To say it differently, a phenomenological description is an example composed of examples. If the description is phenomenologically powerful, then it acquires a certain transparency, so to speak; it permits us to "see" the deeper significance, or meaning, structures of the lived experience it describes. How is such transparency achieved? It is a function of the appropriateness of the theses that we have identified as well as a function of the thoroughness with which we have managed to muster in creating exemplary descriptions by, for example, being sensitive to the evocative "tone" of language in which the descriptions are captured. A description is a powerful one if it reawakens our basic experience of the phenomenon it describes, and in such a manner that we experience the more fundamental grounds of the experience. Varying the examples is the way in which we address the phenomenological themes of a phenomenon so that the "invariant" aspect(s) of the phenomenon itself comes into view.

Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalizes what in some sense is internal or subjective; it disconnects us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world. As we write the paper, and read at what we have written, our objectified thinking now starts back at us. Thus, writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some sense of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible. Researchers recognize this linguistic naure of research in the imperative reminder: "Write!" Human science research requires a commitment to write. But writing for a human science researcher is not just a supplementary activity. The imperative "Write", as Barthes (1986) puts it, "... is intended to recall 'research' to its epistemological condition: whatever it seeks, it must not forget its nature as language — and it is this which ultimately makes an encounter with writing in-riable" (p. 316).

For Barthes, research does not merely involve writing; research is the work of writing — writing is its very essence (1986, p. 316). In the human sciences no research that has failed to write itself has understood its fundamental mandate. For scholars such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty the activities of researching and reflecting on the one hand, and reading and writing on the other, are indeed quite indistinguishable. When one visits the Husserl Archives at the
University of Lorraine this close connection between research and writing becomes evident in the symbolic value of Husserl's desk which occupies a prominent place in the archival room. It is in this desk where phenomenology received its fundamental impetus.

More so than Husserl, Sartre was a phenomenologist who stood and acted in the middle of the hustle and bustle of social and political life. But as writing became "very difficult for the aging Sartre," thinking became difficult as well. "I still think," the seventy-year-old Sartre (1977) said once in an interview, "but because writing has become impossible for me the real activity of thought has in some way been "compressed" (p. 5). Sartre was speaking about the difficulty that the loss of sight created for him a reader and author. It is obvious that for Sartre writing was not just a mere moment in the intellectual life of the thinker. Writing was "somehow at the center of this life. The only point to my life was writing," he said. "I would write out what I had been thinking about beforehand, but the essential moment was that of writing itself." (p. 5). With this line Sartre has given us his most succinct definition of his methodology. Writing is the method. And to ask what methodology in human science is to ask for the nature of writing. What is writing? How is writing research (thinking, reflecting)? Certainly writing is a producing activity. The writer produces text, and he or she produces more than text. The writer produces himself or herself. As Sartre might say: "the writer is the product of his or her own product." Writing is a kind of self-making or forming. To write is to measure the depth of things, as well as to come to a sense of one's own depth.

To Write Is to Measure Our Thoughtfulness

Writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know.

Writing teaches us what we know, and in what way we know what we know. As we commit ourselves to paper we see ourselves mirrored in this text. Now the text confronts us. We try to read it as someone else might, but that is actually quite impossible, since we cannot help but load the words with the intentions of our project. Yet, when the text says less than we want, when it does not seem to say what we want, we sigh: "Can't we do any better than this?" "This is no good!" "We are not coming to terms with it." "Why do we keep going when we are not getting anywhere?" "We need to scrap this." "Let's try it again that way." Writing gives appearance and body to thought. And as it does, we disembodied what in another sense
we already embody. However, not until we had written this down did we quite know what we knew. Writing separates the known from the known (see Ong, 1982, for some distinctions in this section), but it also allows us to reclaim this knowledge and make it our own in a new and more intimate manner. Writing constantly seeks to make external what somehow is internal. We come to know what we know in this dialectic process of constructing a text (a body of knowledge) and thus learning what we are capable of saying. It is the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation.

Writing distances us from the lifeworld, yet it also draws us more closely to the lifeworld.

Writing distances us from lived experience but by doing so it allows us to discover the existential structures of experience. Writing creates a distance between ourselves and the world whereby the subjectivities of daily experience become the object of our reflective awareness. The writer’s immediate domain is paper and pen or keyboard on the one hand and language or words on the other. Both preoccupations have an alienating effect. The author who writes about the experience of parenthood must, temporarily at least, “slacken the threads” between himself or herself and the world. Every parenclauher knows the tensions between the demands made by the two roles even if the object of interest in both cases is the child. Whereas on the one hand writing gets me away from immediate involvement with my child, on the other hand it allows me to create a space for pedagogic reflection on my parenting relation with this child so that I may return to this child with a deeper understanding of the significance of certain realities of the lifeworld.

Writing decontextualizes thought from practice and yet it returns thought to practice.

Writing tends to detach us away from contextual particulars toward a more universal sphere. As we try to capture the meaning of some lived experience in written text, the text in turn assumes a life of its own. Thus writing places us at a distance from the practical immediacy of lived life by being forgetful of its context. Or, rather, writing focuses our reflective awareness by disregarding the incidental and contingencies that constitute the social, physical, and biographic context of a particular situation. But as we are able to gain in this manner a deeper sense of the meanings embodied in some isolated aspect of practice, we are also being prepared to become more discerning of the meaning of new life experiences. And thus
reflectively writing about the practice of living makes it possible for the person to be engaged in a more reflective praxis. By praxis we mean thoughtful action: action full of thought and thought full of action.

Writing abstracts our experience of the world, yet it also concretizes our understanding of the world.

Because language is itself abstractive, writing tends to abstract from the experience we may be trying to describe. This abstractive tendency is a problem for human science research since its aim is precisely to return "to the things themselves," which means to return to the world as lived: "...that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language." (Merleau Ponty, 1962, p. ix). What is the great paradox of language? That it always abstracts from the concreteness of the world which it was responsible for creating in the first place. Writing intellectualizes. We recognize this intellectualizing in the image of Kiesl, Canetti's bookish person, who appears thoroughly alienated from real existence (Canetti, 1978). Yet, writing, true writing can concretize the experience of the world more palpably it seems, more to the shaking core (however strange it may seem) than the world as experienced. The narrative power of story is that sometimes it can be more compelling, more moving, more physically and emotionally shaming than lived life itself. Textual emotion, textual understanding can bring as otherwise unbearable person to word or to exhilaration and to a more deeply understood worldly engagement.

Writing objectifies thought into print and yet it subjectifies our understanding of something that truly engages us.

On the one hand, the inscribing the writing of the text is the research. One writes to make public, to make conversationally available what the author lives with: an idea, a notion being questioned. On the other hand, the text once completed and in print-circulation is now a testimonial, a relic of embodied reflections. More so than long-hand writing printed text is an object. We sense this in the greater ease with which we can take distance from our text once it has been converted into type-faces print. So there is a subjectifying and an objectifying moment in writing and in the way that the word allows us to understand the world. Research is writing in that it places consciousness in the position of the possibility of containing itself, in a self-reflexive relation. To
Writing is to exercise self-consciousness. Writing plays the inner against the outer, the subjective self against the objective self, the ideal against the real.

Writing Exercises the Ability to See

Writing involves a textual reflection in the sense of separating and confronting ourselves with what we know, distancing ourselves from the lifeworld, decontextualizing our thoughtful preoccupations from immediate action, abstracting and objectifying our lived understandings from our concrete involvements (see Org. 1982), and all this for the sake of now requiring us with what we know, drawing us more closely to living relations and situations of the lifeworld, turning thought to a more tactful praxis, and concretizing and subjectifying our deepened understanding in practical action. Writing has been called a term of practical action. Writing is action in the sense of a corporeal practice. The writer practices his or her body in order to make, to "author" something. In one sense, the text is the product of the writer's practical action. But writing exercises more than our mere reductive skills. Writing exercises and makes empirically demonstrable our ability to "see." Writing shows that we can now see something and at the same time it shows the limits or boundaries of our signlessness. In writing the author puts in symbolic form what he or she is capable of seeing. And so practice, in the lifeworld with children, can never be the same again. My writing as a practice prepared me for an insightful praxis in the lifeworld. (I can now see things I could not see before.) Although I may try to close my eyes, I ignore what I have seen, in some way my existence is now mediated by my knowledge. And because are we what we can "see" (know, feel, understand), seeing is already a form of praxis—seeing the significance in a situation places us partly of the event. Writing, true writing is authoring, the exercise of authority: the power that authors and gives shape to our personal being. Writing exercises us in the sense that it empowers us with embodied knowledge which now can be brought into play or realized into action in the performance of the drama of everyday life.

To Write is to Rewrite

The methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology is move a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique. Phenomenology has been called a method without techniques. The "procedures" of this methodology have been recognized as a project of various kinds of questioning, oriented to allow an interpretation of the phenomenon
as identified at first and then cast in the reformulation of a question. The methodology of phenomenology requires a dialectical going back and forth among these various levels of questioning. To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the life-world, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-fleeting, re-organizing).

Sartre describes how writing and rewriting aim at creating depth: constructing successive or multiple layers of meaning, thus laying bare certain truths while retaining an essential sense of ambiguity. This depthful writing cannot be accomplished in one straightforward session. Rather, the process of writing and rewriting (including revising or editing) is more reminiscent of the artistic activity of creating an art object that has to be approached again and again, now here and then there, going back and forth between its parts and the whole in order to arrive at a finely crafted piece that often reflects the personal "signature" of the author. Sartre calls this crafted aspect of a text "style" (1977, pp. 5-9). Naturally, he alludes to something more complex than mere artistic idiosyncrasy or stylistic convention.

One is reminded of Schleiermacher's use of the notion of "style" to refer both to the essential genius of a text and to the thoughtfulness of the author as the producer of the text (1977, pp. 166-173). To write, to work at style, is to exercise an interpretive tact, which in the sense of style produces the thinking/writing body of text. For Schleiermacher "style" was an expression of Geist (mind, culture, spirit), a geisting phenomenon. More modern phenomenological formulations see style as the outward appearance of the embodied being of the person. In writing, the author stylizes in textual form the truth that is given signification in his or her contact with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 59). "Style is what makes all signification possible," says Merleau-Ponty (p. 58). But we should not confuse style with mere technique or method, rather style shows and reflects what the author is capable of seeing and showing in the way that he or she is oriented to the world and to language. It is in this blessed moment where style gathers language to "suddenly swell with a meaning which overflows into the other person when the act of speaking [or writing] binds them up into a single whole" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 235).

The Pedagogical Orientation

For Langfeld the issue of the place and meaning of phenomenological inquiry is primarily a function of how one stands in the world. During his own student years Langfeld had followed lectures from Husserl, and he explicitly accepted phenomenological method while rejecting philosophical aims: "We use the term
'phenomenology' after Husserl. With Husserl the term 'phenomenology' occurs in two meaning contexts: (1) to signify a method, (2) to signify a philosophy. We use the term exclusively to refer to the method and remain completely impartial to Husserl's development of a phenomenological philosophy" (Langeveld, 1972, p. 105) As human science theorist or researcher Langeveld sees himself first and foremost pedagogically oriented. And, argues Langeveld (1979, p. 178), pedagogy "is a science of experience, it is a human science, indeed it is a normative human science which is followed or studied with practical intent." He clarifies, pedagogy "is a science of experience because it finds its object (the pedagogical situation) in the world of lived experience. It is a human science because the pedagogical situation rests on human intent. It is normative because it distinguishes between what is good and what is not good for a child. It is practical because all this is brought to bear in the practical process of education and childraising" (p. 178).

It is important to realize the full import of Langeveld's position. In his widely read text Bekeken theoretische Pedagogiek ('Concise Theoretical Pedagogy') he argues that the pedagogical situation in everyday life is the obvious location of pedagogical experiences and this pedagogical situation is from the very first normative and uniquely anthropologically structured, finding its genesis in the situated relation of parent and child or educator and student. The educator, including the pedagogical theorist or researcher, cannot get around the requirement of being charged with pedagogical responsibility to the child — and this unconditional pedagogical responsibility is there from the very beginning. And so, because of the nature of its object of study — the pedagogical situation — phenomenological pedagogical research cannot be interested in its questions merely out of purely academic or intellectual curiosity. Pedagogy does not just want to know how things are, pedagogical research always has an inherent practical intent, because sooner or later this knowledge figures in how one must act (Langeveld, 1944/79, p. 1).

As suggested above, Langeveld, like most of his contemporaries in Germany and the Netherlands, had little interest in questions of research methodology. He would probably have scoffed at the idea of developing a set of methodological rules or strategies for engaging in phenomenological pedagogical research (see also Levering and Klinkers, 1985). To my knowledge Langeveld never discussed, for example, how or why, he makes such frequent use of anecdotes in his phenomenological pedagogical texts. But my hunch is that he did so not as a result of a particular methodological conviction but rather because the pedagogic lifeworld seems to favor an anecdotal approach. Why? Because anecdotes, like pedagogic situations, are always concrete and particular. And for this reason much of practical "sheerizing" that many of us, parents and teachers, practice in ordinary life is done at the hand of anecdotes. But to
answer this question more fully it may be helpful to articulate some methodological issues that inevitably go beyond the explicit or implicit methodological aims of Langeveld and his co-workers at the Utrecht School, as they go beyond the parameters of Bekaert’s subsequent workshop approach.

In Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy, I have attempted to describe six aspects to the process of phenomenological pedagogical inquiry that constitute simultaneously a textual or writing activity (van Manen, 1989). The process involves:

1. Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience
   Orienting to the Phenomenon
   Formulating the Phenomenological Question
   Explicating Assumptions and Pre-understandings

2. Investigating Experience as We Live It
   Using Personal Experience as a Starting Point
   Tracing Ethnographical Sources
   Searching for Idiomatic Phrases
   Obtaining Experiential Descriptions from Others
   Project Writing (lived-experience descriptions)
   Interpretation (the personal life story)
   Observing the (experiential anecdote)
   Experiential Descriptions in Literature
   Biography as a Resource for Experiential Material
   Diaries, Journals as Sources of Lived Experiences
   Art as a Source of Lived Experience
   Consulting Phenomenological Literature

3. Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection
   Conducting Thematic Analysis
   Isolating Thematic Statements
   Composing Linguistic Transformations
   Cleaning Theoretic Descriptions from Artistic Sources
   Interpretation through Conversation
   Collaborative Analysis: The Research Seminar/Group
   Lifeworld Existentials as Guides to Reflection
   Denoting Incidental and Essential Themes

4. Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing
   Attending to the Speaking of Language
   To Write Is to Rewrite
5. Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Position
Writing in an Oriented Way
6. Balancing the Research Context: Parts and Whole
Working the Text

These aspects of the research-writing process are not only hints regarding the kind of activities that are perhaps helpful in human science inquiry, they are into categories that lend themselves to examine texts such as Langer's "The Secret Place is the Life of the Child" for their implicit methodology. In these pages I am discussing particularly the fourth methodological theme, which includes considerations regarding the use of anecdote as a methodological device.

The Value of Anecdotal Narrative

D'Israeli termed anecdotes "minute notices of human nature and of human learning" (in Fidler, 1985). Anecdotes can teach us. The use of story or of anecdotal material in phenomenological writing is not merely a literary embellishment. The stories themselves are samples or topics of practical theorizing. Anecdotal narratives (stories) are important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential case material on which pedagogic reflection is possible. Methodologically speaking, story is important because it allows the human science text to acquire a narrative quality that is ordinarily characteristic of story. A hybrid textual form is created, combining the power of philosophic or systemic discourse with the power of literary or poetic language. Anecdote particularly in the abstracting tendency of theoretical discourse: it makes it possible to involve us pre reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while paradoxically inviting us into a reflective stance vis-à-vis the meanings embedded in the experience. The important feature of anecdotal as well as phenomenological discourse is that it simultaneously pulls us in but then prompts us to reflect.

The significance of anecdotal narrative in phenomenological research and writing is situated in its power (see Rosen, 1985).

1) to compel: a story recruits our willing attention;
2) to lead us to reflect: a story tends to invite us to a reflective search for significance;
3) to involve us personally: one tends to search actively for the storyteller's meaning via one's own.
(4) to transform: we may be touched, shaken, moved by story; it reaches us; and
(5) to measure one's interpretive sense: one's response to a story is a measure of one's deepened ability to make interpretive sense.

In short, the lacing of anecdotal narrative into more formal textual discourse, if done well, will create a tension between the pre-reflexive and reflexive pulls of language.

Anecdote as a Methodological Device

In spite of Strasser's critique of the impressionistic thrust in the Dutch pedagogical tradition, anecdote and story have become quite common methodological devices in phenomenological research. 'Story' means narrative, something depicted in narrative form. On the one hand, all human science has a narrative quality (rather than as an abstracting classificatory or quantitative character). And the story form has become a popular method for presenting aspects of qualitative or human science research. Anecdotes are a special kind of story. For example, when Langeveld (1984) wants to explain the significance of a "thing" in a child's life, he tells a story about a little girl who offers her baby brother a tiny feather. 'The four-year-old comes to her mother, who is busy with the newborn baby, and has a "treasure" in her hand. It is a tiny feather of a sparrow. This is for little brother, because he is still so small.' Now that is a true gift!" says Langeveld (p. 218). And he uses the anecdote to make a distinction between a present and a gift. A present is something we give to someone as a wedding present or as fulfillment of an obligation or debt. The French have a saying that small presents maintain friendship: Langeveld shows that it is directly reversed with gifts: "A present can make friendship, but love and friendship make gifts, even the smallest ones, possible...So the little girl's feather is small — to be i: isn't the little brother small too? But how delicate and soft the feather is! It almost makes the best Mother delicate and soft too!" (p. 218). And so Langeveld continues, where gives a present to someone, gives something from the store, often merely just a suggestion from the salesperson. But whoever gives a gift (and not just a mere present) gives himself or herself. He or she is the thing.

Here is another example: In his introduction to Person and World, Van den Berg tells an anecdote of a native of the Malayan jungles (Van den Berg and Linchooten, 1953). In order to learn what impression a large and modern city would make on an inhabitant of the jungle, one had placed this man unexpectedly and without much ado in the middle of the large city of Singapore. One walked with him through the busy streets in order to provide the native with ample opportunity to observe whatever a
metropolis could offer. When at the end of the trip one asked him what had struck him most, he did not, as one might have expected, talk about the paved streets, the brick houses, concrete buildings, cars, streetcars and trains. Instead, he mentioned how to his amazement one person could carry so many bananas. What he appeared to have seen was a street vendor who transported his bunches of bananas on a push cart. "For the rest the native hardly had seen anything," says Van den Berg (1953, p. 5). This person who lives in the jungle village is engaged in a dialogue with the things of his world which allows him to see things in a manner which we, urban dwellers of post-industrialized societies, could not possibly share. This native is engaged in a different conversation with things. Every new object he sees appears in front of his eyes in a modality that permits a certain role in that conversation. Any object that cannot adopt such modality therefore cannot enter the conversational relation. It does not speak to him and therefore cannot be seen, says Van den Berg. Thus Van den Berg uses, among other things, the anecdote as a device for making comprehensible, what I would call the phenomenon of conversational relation which every human being maintains with his or her world. What Van den Berg wants to show by way of anecdote and phenomenological explication is that the human being not only stands in a certain conversational relation to the world — the human being really is this relation.

Anecdotes, in the sense that they occur in the phenomenological writings of, for example, Sartre, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty are not to be understood as mere illustrations to "beautify" or "make more easily digestible" a difficult or boring text. Anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us. The use of anecdote in human science discourse is analogous to the use of metaphor. We use metaphor to explain or provide insight into the nature of one phenomenon at the hand of another phenomenon. Anecdote too is used as a methodological device to describe something indirectly when this phenomenon resists direct description. However, anecdote has a stronger phenomenological quality than metaphor. While metaphor may tend to dwell at the level of abstraction, anecdote turns the attention more naturally to the level of the concrete.

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines anecdote as “a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident.” And the Oxford English Dictionary defines anecdote as “secret, private, or hitherto unpublished narratives or details of history.” It speaks of the narrative of an incident or event as “being in itself interesting or striking.” The term derives from the Greek meaning “things unpublished, something not given out.” And indeed, Cicero (and later Renaissance scholars as well) described some of his unpublished manuscripts as anecdotes.
"things not given out." Anecdotes are social products. In everyday life the anecdote usually begins its course as part of an oral tradition. Often, it is originally a fragment of the biography of some famous or well-known person. Thus, Samuel Johnson described anecdote as "a biographical incident; a minute passage of private life." Biographers and historians value anecdotes for their power to reveal the true character of persons or of times which are hard to capture in any other manner (Fuldman, 1985, p. xvii).

But often anecdote was information meant for insiders, stuff that for discretionary reasons did not make the written record. Sometimes the anecdote was used to characterize a way of thinking or a style of figure which was really too difficult to approach in a more direct manner. This is one epistemologically interesting feature of anecdote: that if we cannot quite grasp the point or essence of a subject and we keep looking at it from the outside, as we were, then we may be satisfied with an anecdotal story or fragment (Verhoeven, 1987).

There is an amusing anecdote about Edmund Husserl whose voluminous writings on phenomenology contain painstaking refutations of every conceivable objection to his philosophical system. As a boy Edmund wanted to sharpen his knife. And he persisted in making his knife sharper and sharper until finally he had nothing left to shave. (Roel, 1980, p. 10). The anecdote aptly demonstrates the perfectionistic qualities in Husserl's character. Husserl is accustomed to reflect with his pen and paper. His phenomenological research was truly a mental labor. He would revise, rewrite and edit endlessly his fundamental writings. And after his death was discovered an astonishing collection of about 40,000 pages written in stenographic script.

An interesting case of the significance of anecdotes in human science thinking concerns the doctrine or philosophy of Diogenes Laertius, also called The Cynic or Dogman, or "a Socrates gone mad" (Herkelkens and Disdier, 1979, p. 35). There are no authentic texts left from this thinker, who at any rate considered living more important than writing. What is available are just anecdotes. Legend has it that the youthful Alexander the Great one day went to visit the philosopher Diogenes about whom he had heard such strange stories. He came upon the philosopher while the latter was relaxing in the beautiful sunshine.

Alexander: I am Alexander the Great.

Diogenes: I am Diogenes, the dog.

Alexander: The dog!
Diogenes: I nuzzle the kind, bark at the greedy, and bite louts.

Alexander: What can I do for you?

Diogenes: Stand out of my light. (p. 30)

While Alexander wanted to show his benevolence and generosity to the thinker, the latter showed that he knew only too well the nature of worldly temptations. But rather than to theorize and to get entrapped into the sadistic sphere of theoretical knowledge, Diogenes "showed" his argument in verbal gesture: "get out of my sun." By means of this pantomimic demonstration Diogenes shows more effectively than theoretical discourse might do how the philosopher fines himself or herself from the politician. He was the first person who was free enough to be able to put the mighty Alexander in his place. Diogenes' answer not only ignored the desire of power, but also the overwhelming power of desire (Sloetervijk, 1983, p. 265). And so, this humble and watchful philosopher showed himself more powerful and autonomous than the feared victor Alexander who went all the way to the borders of India to satisfy his need for power. Did Alexander recognize the sense of superiority of the moral life of the "wise?" History has it that Alexander once said: "...if I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes" (Herkleitos and Diogenes, 1979, p. 36). Diogenes and Alexander the Great died on the same day, a fact to which people have attached superstitious significance.

So, Diogenes set out to teach his fellow citizens not by giving speeches or by writing books but by means of pantomimic exercise and by living example. A kind of street theatre, one might say. Sloetervijk (1983) has argued that the auraole of anecdotes that surrounds the figure of Diogenes is more clarifying of his teachings than any writings he could have written. And yet the reason that Diogenes' philosophy has not been more influential may also find its cause in the fact that it is only anecdotes that have been preserved. Anecdotes have enjoyed low status in scholarly writings, since, in contrast to historical accounts or reports, they rest on dubious factual evidence. The shabby reputation of anecdotes may derive from the sixth-century Byzantine historian Procopius who called his posthumously published scandalous account of the Emperor Justinian Anecdota or Historia Aviana ("Secret History"). In everyday life, too, anecdotes may get negative reactions. For example, we may hear someone say that a certain account should be distrusted since "it was merely on anecdotal evidence." Evidence that is "only anecdotal" is not permitted to furnish a proper argument. Of course, it is entirely fallacious to generalize from a case on the basis of mere anecdotal evidence. But empirical generalization is not the aim of
phenomenological research. The point that the critics of anecdotes miss is that the anecdote is to be valued for other than factual-empirical or factual-historical reasons.

An historical account describes a thing that has happened in the past, but an anecdote is rather like a poetic narrative which describes a universal truth. Verhoeven (1987) argues that what Aristotle says about the poetic epic of his time applies to the anecdotal narrative of our time:

"... the poet’s function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable or necessary. Poetry is something more philosophic and of greater import than history, since its statements are of the nature of what of universals, whereas those of history are singulars." (Artside, 1941, p. 145)

Anecdotes may have a variety of functions (see Verhoeven, 1987, for some distinctions made here; also Fudiman, 1985). The ones that are of significance to human science discourse may include the following characteristics:

(1) Anecdotes form a concrete counterweight to abstract theoretical thought. The object of phenomenological description is not to develop theoretical abstractions that remain severed from the concrete reality of lived experience. Rather phenomenology tries to penetrate the layers of meaning of the concrete by lifting and turning the soil of daily existence. Anecdote is one of the implements for laying bare the covered-over meanings.

(2) Anecdotes express a certain disdain for the alienated and alienating discourse of scholars who have difficulty showing how life and theoretical propositions are connected. Thus, anecdotes possess a certain pragmatic point. They force us to search out the relation between living and thinking, between situation and reflection. In this connection Fudiman (1982, p. 97) notes how anecdotes has acted as a leveling device, how it humanizes, democratizes, and acts as a counterweight to solemnity.

(3) Anecdotes may provide an account of certain teachings or doctrines which were never written down. Socrates and Diogenes are examples of great thinkers about whom anecdotal life stories form both their biographies as well as the essence of their teachings. This historical phenomenon also shows the great potential and generally acknowledged power of anecdote in human science discourse. Plato’s Dialogues is a collection of anecdotes about Socrates, the philosopher. It differs markedly from the large body of philosophical writings that have followed it down the ages. At the methodological level Plato’s writings are
round-about or indirect reflections about fundamental human experiences such as friendship (Lyco, love (Phaedrus, Symposium), teaching virtue (Meno), and so forth.

(4) Anecdotes may be encountered as concrete demonstrations of wisdom, sensitive insight, and proverbial truth. Classical figures considered their anecdotes as narrative confirmations of generally acknowledged truths (Fiddes, 1985, p. xxi). For example, the anecdote of the cave in Plato’s Republic is offered by Plato as allegory or possible story. Plato’s accounts are offered not as factual truths in the empirical or historical sense but, in Plato’s words, as “likely stories.” By their anecdotal quality we come to see what is possible and what is not possible in the world in which we live (Cairns, 1971, p. 10).

(5) Anecdotes of a certain event or incident may acquire the significance of exemplary character. Because anecdote is concrete and taken from life (in a fictional or real sense) it may be offered as an example or as a recommendation for acting or seeing things in a certain way. In everyday life an anecdote may be told as a useful response (a “message”) to the recipient of the anecdote in some or perceive a certain truth that is otherwise difficult to put into clear language.

Anecdotal narrative in story form is an effective way of dealing with certain kinds of knowledge. “Narrative, to narrate,” derives from the Latin narrare, narrare, “to know.” To narrate is to tell something in narrative or story form. The paradoxical thing about anecdotal narrative is that it tells something particular while really addressing the general or the universal. And vice versa, at the hand of anecdote fundamental insights or truths are treated for their value in the contingent world of everyday experience. One may therefore say that the anecdote shares a fundamental epistemological or methodological feature with phenomenological human science which also operates in the tension between particularity and universality.

To conclude, the approach described in this paper, and elaborated in the book Researching Lived Experience (van Manen, 1989), takes seriously a theme that is self-evident and yet seldom acknowledged: hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. In the human sciences research and writing are aspects of one process. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are human science approaches which are rooted in philosophy; they are philosophies in the sense of reflective disciplines. Therefore, it is important for the human science researcher in education to know something of the philosophical traditions. But Langeveld has reminded us that this does not mean that one must become a professional philosopher in an academic sense. It means that one should know enough to be able to articulate
the epistemological or theoretical implications of doing phenomenology and hermeneutics — without losing sight of the fact that one is interested in the pedagogic praxis of this research; more appropriately, it means that human science research practised by an educator is more pedagogic human science.

The end of human science research for educators is a critical pedagogic competence: knowing how to act suitably in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edited thoughtfulness. To that end hermeneutic phenomenological research re-integrates part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire. It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives. It makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. Phenomenological descriptions, if done well, are compelling and insightful. The eloquence of the text may contrast sharply with the talk, meagre, and difficulties involved in the research/writing process. "And this took that long to write, you say?"

"After seven drafts?"

It all seems somewhat absurd until we begin to discern the silence in the writing — the cultivation of one’s being, from which the words begin to proliferate in halingly issued groupings, thus finally in a carefully written work, much less completed than interrupted, a blushing response to a call to say something worth saying, or actually say something, while being thoughtfully aware of the rare with which such speaking can reduce itself to academic chants.

Notes

1 Bialow is usually associated with the German, more hermeneutic Gewissenswissenschaftliche (Haman Science) movement except that in work, more so than that of his German colleagues, expresses affinity to the more existential phenomenology of the Utrecht School.

2 Strasser (1963/76) does not name any particular work as 'scholarly but in the Netherlands one knows' who were meant to fit the shoe. In another book Strasser levels a similar critique of Sjtre's description of the gaze (Strasser, 1974, p. 198).

3 At the theoretical level their work would need concepts or terms that could capture in epistemologically as well as in pedagogically sensitive language the pedagogically pragmatic nature of the research process. In my own work I have employed the
notions "pedagogic thoughtfulness" and "pedagogic tacit" as the terms to meet this
german theorist (such as Neuh, Litt, and Finium) before Langeveld had talked in this
respect of the autonomous nature of the pedagogical situation and relation that
cannot be reduced to any other human phenomenon or sphere of human activity.

5 Only after much pressure did Langeveld, in later editions, add a chapter
containing a methodological discussion to his "Cohocie Theoretical Pedagogy"; by
this discussion as well as his text Capita Uit De Algemene Methodologie Der
Onderwijskunde ("Subjects from the General Methodology of Pedagogical
Science") still does not deal with questions of method that would have clear
implications for the practices of phenomenological research.

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