

Leadership for Learning as Experience: Introducing the Use of Vignettes for Research on Leadership Experiences in Schools

International Journal of Qualitative Methods
Volume 17: 1–13
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DOI: 10.1177/1609406918816409
journals.sagepub.com/home/ijq


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Abstract

Research on the link between educational leadership and student learning employs a variety of quantitative and qualitative research designs. Surprisingly, there are relatively few studies on methods for researching educational leadership practices. This article addresses this gap in research and discusses how the experiences of different participants can constitute potential starting points for learning processes. This leads to the question, how and to what extent the educational leadership practices manifest in students' experiences and how "Leadership for Learning as Experience" can be empirically researched. The phenomenologically oriented vignette as research method for studying educational leadership practices will be introduced. Vignettes are narratives that are based on the experiences of participants. In vignettes, the co-experienced observations in the field are captured in form of vivid narratives. Vignettes thus open up a new, supplementary perspective, in which the traces that leadership practices have left on school participants are revealed.

Keywords

vignette, experience, methods, leadership research, leadership for learning

What Is Already Known?

There are empirical findings showing that certain educational leadership practices can improve student learning (e. g. introducing new methods, articulating a vision for the School), but these findings are not yet sufficiently detailed, systematic and nuanced to enable system-wide improvements. Consequently, there are a growing number of educational leadership studies calling on Researchers to find new methodological approaches for researching leadership practices and their (potential) effects on student learning.

What This Paper Adds?

The present paper addresses this desideratum by investigating the experiences of participants in schools and introducing the phenomenologically oriented vignette as a research method for studying educational leadership practices. Still now there are only few projects addressing the topic from a phenomenological perspective.

Outline of the Problem

Although educational leadership in the area of K–12 education is a relatively new research field (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison,

2012), it has already generated a host of theoretical approaches, models, analyses, policy papers, and so on, which explore diverse questions using a variety of research methods. The abundance of studies and publications is evident from the various meta-studies on educational leadership that have been published in recent years (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016; Walker, Hu, & Qian, 2012). "Leadership for Learning" appears to be a topic of particular interest, which is understandable given that student learning is, of course, one of schools' central objectives. Studies of leadership for learning are mainly concerned with what effect (if any) leadership has on student learning (e.g., Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2009; Townsend & MacBeath, 2011a, 2011b). For example, the review by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004, p. 70) comes to the conclusion

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that “leadership is second in strength only to classroom instruction.” They argue that principals have an indirect impact on student learning through their effects on school participants and structural conditions in schools. Pietsch, Lücken, Thonke, Klitsche, and Musekamp (2016) conclude that teaching practices are influenced both directly and indirectly by schools’ working conditions and capacity for innovation. This conclusion is supported by diverse studies (e.g., Bell, Bolam, & Cubillo, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 2011). Similar conclusions were also reached in the meta-analysis conducted by Hattie (2014), which found out that educational leadership has a moderate effect on students’ learning outcomes.

Still, Hattie distinguishes between instructional and transformational leadership, and his studies show the former having a greater influence. Additionally, one has to take into account that Hattie’s study is viewed critically from a methodological perspective and against the background of the transferability to the everyday school life of teachers and principals too (Snook, O’Neill, Clark, O’Neill, & Openshaw, 2009).

There are empirical findings (e.g., Robinson, 2007) showing that certain educational leadership practices can improve student learning (e.g., improve conditions for teaching and learning, introducing and enhancing new instructional methods, and articulating a vision for the school; Day & Sammons, 2013), but these findings are not yet sufficiently detailed, systematic and nuanced to enable system-wide improvements (Leithwood et al., 2004). Consequently, there are a growing number of educational leadership studies calling for researchers to find new methodological approaches for researching educational leadership practices and their (potential) effects on student learning (e.g., Feldhoff, Radisch, & Bischoff, 2016; Hallinger, 2011; Muijs, 2011; Wiesner, George, Kemethofer, & Schratz, 2015). The present article addresses this desideratum by investigating the experiences of participants in schools and introducing the phenomenologically oriented vignette as a research method for studying educational leadership practices. There are still only few projects (e.g., Gilstrap, 2007; Souba, 2014) addressing the topic leadership from a phenomenological perspective. This contribution will be guided by the following central research question:

- How can experiences of learning be empirically researched from the perspective of a phenomenology of the living body with co-experienced observations?

This article takes a qualitative approach to the complex interrelations in K–12 schools and looks at learning from a phenomenological perspective. Leadership for learning, and therefore also learning itself, is characterized by the experiences of various school participants (principals, teachers, and students).

The intent of phenomenological research is to understand the phenomena, in this case leadership phenomena, on their own terms to provide a credible description of human experience as it is experienced by the individual. (Klenke, 2008, p. 223)

In this article, “Leadership for Learning as Experience” is defined as negotiating experiential spaces against the background of structuring conditions while respecting the mutually agreed pedagogical concept and enduring leaders’ own experiences and those of the people they lead, which can be joyful but also painful.

I begin with a review of recent literature on leadership for learning research, before introducing “vignettes” as a research method for capturing experiences. Based on an example vignette from a research project, I then discuss what contribution vignettes can make to studies of educational leadership practices. I conclude with some critical reflections and discuss the implications of my findings for future research.

Literature Review

There are relatively few studies on methods for researching educational leadership practices, especially ones that include experience-based approaches to school (leadership) research. Despite this lack of scholarship, I present a brief outline of selected studies that do address this topic, below.

On a meta level, Hallinger and Huber (2012) identify at least three distinct research programs in the fields of educational leadership and management research. Firstly, many studies attempt to understand how leadership practices achieve effects in different school settings and organizational contexts. Secondly, there are numerous studies of principals’ time use and allocation, which closely resemble studies from management research, based on detailed observation of managers’ activities, such as those conducted by Mintzberg (1970, 1973). A third trend investigates how the use of a variety of research strategies in studies on leadership can yield additional insights. Research on the link between educational leadership and student learning—sometimes referred to in the literature as the “black hole” (e.g., Leithwood et al., 2009) or “black box” (e.g., Heck & Hallinger, 2010)—employs a variety of quantitative (e.g., Klein, 2015; Pietsch, Lücken, Thonke, Klitsche, & Musekamp, 2016) and qualitative (e.g., Sanders, 2016; Venebo, 2017) research designs. Recently, there has also been an increasing number of mixed-methods studies (e.g., Huber, 2013; Thillmann, Brauckmann, Herrmann, & Thiel, 2015).

Hallinger (2011) analyzed 130 doctoral dissertations between 1983 and 2010 that made use of the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) and attempted to identify methodological trends in the study of educational leadership. Due to the focus on dissertations using the PIMRS, the sample was skewed toward the quantitative research paradigm. Hallinger (2011) concludes that the PIMRS is a reliable tool for studying instructional leadership. However, he also suggests that future studies should focus more on the black box between educational leadership and student learning, since this link cannot be investigated with the methodological approaches used in the analyzed studies.

Feldhoff, Radisch, and Bischoff (2016) analyzed 428 longitudinal school improvement studies that were published between 1998 and the start of February 2014 in four “high-impact review journals of school improvement” (p. 218) and looked at the designs the studies used to investigate school

improvement processes. The authors conclude that complex research designs that take different aspects of school improvement into account are

the only opportunity to move a step further regarding our knowledge on school improvement and its influence on student outcomes. (Feldhoff et al., 2016, p. 234)

They call for greater use of mixed-methods studies, as such studies are better at capturing the complexity of school improvement processes, which in turn permits deeper theoretical understanding of these processes (Feldhoff et al., 2016). Muijs (2011) analyzed a random sample of 500 articles from educational leadership journals and found that 37.6% of them were empirically supported by data from mixed-methods case studies, most of which were based on 1- or 2-day school visits. Muijs argues that such short field visits are insufficient to gain an in-depth understanding of practices in the schools. This criticism appears *prima facie* plausible, even if it is formulated in overly absolute terms: the appropriate length of a visit may vary according to the research objectives or methods. The research designs used in educational leadership studies often take a retrospective look at a school transformation process that has already been concluded. The studies analyzed by Muijs make use of surveys and interviews. Muijs argues that these methods have certain limitations: In interviews, for example, there is always the risk that interviewees will describe events more positively than they have actually been perceived by them at the time (this may result to a certain degree because of the desire to present themselves as an effective principal). Similar risks apply to surveys, which also have a certain response bias (cf. Muijs, 2011).

A more in-depth study by Tulowitzki (2017) analyzed 29 studies that used the method of shadowing during school visits. His analysis focuses on the studies' research designs, investigating questions such as the parameters used to define shadowing and the potential merits or pitfalls of shadowing. Tulowitzki found that the categories of shadowing are only explicated or described in very few cases. In 12 of the 29 studies, there is no explicit definition of what the authors mean by shadowing. Presumably, also these studies do not present arguments why shadowing is a suitable method for studying educational leadership practices. Tulowitzki concludes that shadowing principals has the potential to provide new insights for both practitioners and researchers. However, he believes that in order for shadowing to gain greater acceptance as a method for studying educational leadership, it needs to be further refined.

In her 2007 study, Le Grange advocates the use of new approaches in leadership and management research. She argues that conventional methods are unable to capture the complexity of the world and that choosing a particular method always excludes certain essential aspects, making the choice of method a performative act of inclusion and exclusion.

Dominant versions of method tend to distort the world in the sense that they only capture parts of it—modes of knowing in other ways are excluded. (Le Grange, 2007, p. 421)

In her conclusion, Le Grange (2007) calls for a critical reassessment of conventional methods and argues that new methods should be used as a way of overcoming the limitations she has identified.

In conclusion, the selected studies reviewed above reveal the methodological diversity of research on educational leadership and the wide variety of perspectives from which it is (or, normatively speaking, should be) approached. The studies all come to similar conclusions, arguing that mixed-methods approaches should be used for the study of educational leadership practices. This call for new methods is encapsulated in a question posed by Le Grange (2007, p. 424):

What parts of reality do conventional social sciences methods not catch and can method be (re)imagined so as to capture what is silenced by conventional methods?

Experience as a Point of Departure for Studying Educational Leadership Practices: Theoretical Positions

For researchers studying leadership for learning, the theory of learning that they operate with is of crucial importance. This may seem to be a trivial observation, and yet many authors do not explicitly define the conception of learning to underpin their studies—one notable exception is, for example, MacBeath (2009). In many other cases, the conception is often only implicitly suggested. This is not surprising, given that learning processes are often elusive while they are beginning or ongoing. A way to empirically document such processes at all is usually on the basis of their outcomes (Schwarz, Schratz, & Westfall-Greiter, 2013). For example, Heck and Hallinger (2010, p. 229) define “growth in student learning as the change in Math scores of a longitudinal student cohort during the study.” This emphasis on standardized measures of educational output neglects practices that have a not insignificant impact on schools and teaching and therefore learning. Shirley (2016) critically comments,

Educational change has stagnated for decades as policy in too many jurisdictions has followed the siren call of standardization, testing, and accountability. This has led schools down a soulless path of prescribed instruction, narrowed curriculum, and relentless and pervasive examinations. The consequence has been students who are bored, teachers who are demoralized, and a public that is dissatisfied. (p. 11)

Certain factors are indicative of richer and more varied school and learning settings and therefore of certain relevance for school improvement: for example, whether a school sees itself as a learning organization, whether it has a climate conducive to learning, how committed it is to values of diversity and responsibility, or how high the quality of teaching is. These factors can be used to characterize the quality of particular schools (Beutel, Höhmann, Pant, & Schratz, 2016). They can

also serve as the basis for a comprehensive pedagogical concept aimed at creating a positive learning climate and hence represent central experiential spaces of deliberate and unintentional influence by principals.

There have been a number of educational leadership studies that look at the concept of “experience” and its significance for studying educational leadership practices and school improvement (e.g., Briggs et al., 2012; Gunter, 2005; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Rößler & Ammann, 2017). However, these studies often fail to define precisely what they mean by experience or how the concept of experience can be fruitfully used in school research (Göhlich, 2009). Following Bollnow (2013), we might also ask whether the use of a concept like experience does not already presuppose a specific conception of empirical methodology. For example, Leithwood and Louis (1998) argue that organizations continuously accumulate experiences that either reinforce or change their behavior. This argument implicitly presupposes a concept of experience according to which experience can be verbalized and made available to others. There are some studies that look at the lived experiences of students, teachers, and principals, though also these studies generally deploy a vague and imprecisely defined concept of experience (e.g., Catacutan & de Guzman, 2016; Mehdinezhad & Sardarzahi, 2016; Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengtson, 2012; Plessis, Carroll, & Gillies, 2015; Shava & Ndebele, 2016; Vennebo, 2017; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016). They often implicitly equate participants’ narratives of organizational experiences with the experiences of themselves.

This article is based on a phenomenological conception of experience and learning. Learning itself, and hence “Leadership for Learning as Experience,” is characterized by the experiences of various school participants (principals, teachers, and students).

Phenomenology as a philosophy of experience means the attempt to understand the experiences of the world, the other and of myself, even if there is an inevitable distance between my concrete, situated experiences and my return to them while I am talking or thinking about them. (Meyer-Drawe, 2017, p. 14)

To explore students’ and teachers’ experiences in responsive relationships, it is helpful to adopt what Schratz (2009) terms a *lernseits* perspective—a perspective that takes account of a realm of learning “beyond teaching,” in which teaching and leading are conceived in terms of the mode of learning and being led. The formative character of experiences emerges by engagement with the world—for example, with the teaching process, with teachers, principals, and fellow students (Schratz, Schwarz, & Westfall-Greiter, 2012). Teaching is not a self-contained process, it emerges in the learning of others (Schwarz et al., 2013). Also leadership is not self-contained but emerges in those who are led and their experiences with the leader. Leading and being led can hence, like teaching itself, be characterized as responsive processes (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, 2010; Waldenfels, 1994).

“Leadership for Learning as Experience”: On the Link Between Leadership, Learning, and Experience

In this article, experiences are understood as a starting point for studying “Leadership for Learning as Experience.” The first thing that needs to be clarified is the conditions required for such experiences. According to Bollnow (2013), these conditions are unexpected events and moments with the potential to initiate experiences. With reference to Aristotle’s *Poetica* (1996), such a key moment could be described as *peripeteia*, which is Greek and means “moment of sudden change.” *Peripeteia* is a concept that describes the reversal of the fortune experienced by tragic characters. In these situations, the eyes of the character are opened, and they begin to reunderstand the way the action will proceed. Similar situations were used for narrative research (Greenhalgh, Russel, & Swinglehurst, 2005) in organizations, for example, the analysis of stories of critical incidents in intercultural business collaborations (Gertsen & Soderberg, 2011). The experiences of the people involved in the moment of *peripeteia* open the path to understand and research the link between leadership and learning. When people’s everyday life proceeds in a normal way and in accordance with their expectations and routines, there is no potential to have any new experiences. The daily actions of a principal, a student, or a teacher follow clear routines and rituals, which are expected to be alike as they were yesterday and the day before yesterday. Teaching in a classroom is a highly individual action and although one can never teach and act like he or she did in the previous lesson, the expectations opposite the routines and patterns one collected over time lead the actions. Experiences in this phenomenological view only occur in the moment of *peripeteia*, when the expectations cease to be fulfilled or are confounded and the routines and rituals break down. These experiences, and hence also their learning processes, are shaped by the fragility, confusion, difficulty, and irregularity manifested in such situations (cf. Waldenfels, 2004). In schools, these moments of confounded expectations can occur, for example, in situations not previously encountered in the classroom—for example, when a student behaves in a manner perceived as deviant—when participants are unable to draw on prior experiences to determine how they should respond. Experiences cannot be planned or predicted and can be painful (Bollnow, 2013), since they occur unexpectedly and upset the status quo.

But there can be pleasant surprises too, which also confound expectations, for example, when a student does unexpectedly well at a test, which may inspire a more positive outlook in the future and raise teachers’ expectations of the student’s capabilities. The fundamental assumption underlying experience-focused research is that individuals can only learn from their own experiences, not those of others. Experiences happen when the expectations are not fulfilled anymore. In the moment of the experience, one cannot ignore or dismiss one’s own experiences. They elude all planning and prediction and can be characterized as starting points for learning processes. This conception of learning focuses on individual *experience*.

Learning in this sense depends not only on our initiative. We cannot just resolve to learn. The whole reliable order can reach deadlock. The old reliable knowledge and ability mismatch while we do not yet have any new possibility. (Meyer-Drawe, 2010, abstract)

Such moments can occur in schools anytime, anywhere, and have the potential to reveal something about the school and the participants' experience; what exactly they reveal will depend on which expectations have been confounded. In cases where people are no longer able to draw on tried-and-tested behaviors, structures, or rules, they will suddenly find themselves on uncertain ground, looking for new, different rules and structures, or else (re)producing them from scratch (Giddens, 2004). These moments of uncertainty and helplessness, but also of joyful surprise, need to be empirically documented, since it is in these moments that leadership practices (on teachers and students) are revealed.

Empirically Studying Experiential Moments in School Settings

This raises the methodological question of how experiences can be studied empirically. To answer this question, we must first turn our attention to the experiential moment. As introduced, this moment can be characterized as peripeteia using Aristotle's work (1996). Although the concept is theoretical in its nature, it can provide considerations which are helpful to capture an experiential moment.

Aristotle argued in his work for three key elements in a drama: These were events and actions which unfold over time. The employment in form of rhetorical juxtaposition of the events and actions to involve meaning. Finally, the trouble, in form of peripeteia, as the unexpected in form of surprise or a turning point in the plot (Greenhalgh et al., 2005, p. 443). Before the moment of peripeteia, actions a person takes are understood in one frame of reference, and after the moment, the earlier actions need new interpretations because the meaning and the context change and the "drama" takes a new direction (Engwall & Westling, 2004). Life in different organizations like schools follows rules and expectations one can rely on till a turning point happens.

Turning points in real-life stories (...) represent peripeteia in the Aristotelian sense. They are often characterized by a plot development that changes the actantial model, sometimes as an expression of increased knowledge (anagnorisis). (Gertsen & Soderberg, 2011, p. 790)

Viewed through the lens of micropolitics (Ball, 1987), for example, as an organizational theory, schools are emotional experiential zones (Crozier & Friedberg, 1979; Rößler & Ammann, 2017) that can be characterized, firstly, in terms of an interplay between individual affective arenas and, hence, the experiences of individuals and, secondly, in terms of social and emotional interrelations between members of organizations and the action-guiding structural conditions of emotionally charged interactions (Küpers & Weibler, 2005). Within these experiential zones, a

process of negotiation takes place between participants that (re)produces the organization's structure.

Not only large-scale interventions like new laws have the potential to initiate experiences but also the seemingly insignificant micro-activities that take place in schools, such as the brief conversations between a principal and a teacher in the corridor or the decisions made by a principal sitting alone in the office, can have an impact (in a big or small way) on life in the school as a whole or on individual teachers and hence create organizational experiential zones. Examples for decisions could include time and space allocation, putting together teaching teams or appointing team leaders. Depending on the degree of personal involvement and associated expectations, space for potential experiences will open up in the flow of students', teachers', or parents' daily expectations. The space that these experiences reveal between old structures and new structures that do not yet exist creates an opportunity to capture the experiences empirically, thus enabling them to be subjected to further analysis.

The aim is not to dissect experiences into their individual components, as this would cause researchers to lose sight of the mesh of responsive relationships as a whole (Klenke, 2008). The experiences in these arenas of interaction between school participants are constantly accompanied by physical reactions expressed by emotions, whether in the form of joy, fear, laughter, anger, or pain (Schratz et al., 2012).

Also in embodying... the body acts as a medium of affective and symbolic communication through regulated bodily language, gestures and appearances. (Küpers, 2015, p. 39)

These physical reactions are external manifestations of experiences and the turmoil the body undergoes in moments of emotion. Feelings and accompanying emotions can be revealed either nonverbally (e.g., through facial expressions, gestures, blushing, posture) or verbally (e.g., through the voice becoming loud or tremulous; Küpers & Weibler, 2005).

Lived experiences, which as described above can be understood as a point of departure for learning in the moment of peripeteia, can be both the source and object of phenomenological research, and special research methods are required to capture them. As well as being externally visible signs of experiential moments, verbal and nonverbal signals can form the basis for vignettes in form of "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1991) that articulate "anecdotes of lived experience" (van Manen, 1990) in words. Vignettes are brief, vivid narratives of researchers' co-experienced experiences (Beekman, 1987) in a specific situation. The method of the phenomenologically oriented vignette was developed over the course of a 4-year research project as a method for articulating co-experienced moments in linguistic form (see Schratz et al., 2012; Schwarz et al., 2013). Vignettes have already been used in various research projects exploring experiences of learning (e.g., Agostini, 2016; Nageler-Schluga, 2013; Peterlini, 2016; Schwarz, 2018). One project, for example, has shown how teachers disturb students in class during their learning processes. This brought an additional new perspective to the discussion of

classroom disturbances, which has assumed that lessons are disturbed only by students (Nageler-Schluga, 2015).

Phenomenologically Oriented Vignettes: A Definition

Using narratives to study organizational processes is becoming something of a tradition (e.g., Czarniawska, 2015; Rößler & Ammann, 2017). For instance, stories told by school participants can be interpreted as meaning-creating processes that retrospectively assign meaning to certain events (Weick, 1995, 1988). Other forms of written documentation used in school research include portraiture, which is now well-established in studies of educational leadership (Hackmann, 2002) as a method for achieving an enhanced understanding of a particular research subject based on field observation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraitures are

a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. (...) The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv).

Such portraits have the potential to capture the world of a particular school. Compared to vignettes, they result from communicative processes of negotiation in which researchers talk to participants and explore various facets of school life within the scope of the research question. However, portraits are descriptions of an organizational culture; they do not focus on individual moments with the potential to trigger experiences in school participants (Hackmann, 2002). Rather, they portray the school culture from a distant, analytical perspective in an attempt to capture an overall picture of the school that transcends specific individual experiential moments.

If, by contrast, one wishes to investigate the experiences that particular participants have in the field in greater depth, then vignettes would appear to be a good choice of method, particularly given the growing calls in the literature for new and creative methodological approaches for the study of educational leadership processes (e.g., Feldhoff et al., 2016; Gronn & Ribbins, 1996; Hallinger, 2011; Le Grange, 2007). Vignettes are narratives that, following a phenomenological research tradition, are based on the experiences of participants in the field.

The term vignette occurs in both quantitative and qualitative study designs and is defined and applied in highly varied ways (Angelides, Leigh, & Gibbs, 2004; Erickson, 1986; Miles, 1990; Poulou, 2001), with variants ranging from fictional, freely invented people and stories (e.g., Poulou, 2001) to scenes co-experienced and documented by researchers in the field (e.g., Angelides et al., 2004). What all the different types appear to have in common is that they are everyday scenes (albeit ones that may have been freely invented). Something

that is critical in the use of vignettes is the purpose for which they are being used. Fictional in this sense means that an author based on his imagination writes them. The scene is developed by the ideas of the author and therefore cannot claim for itself that the scene happened like this. For example, fictional vignettes could be a good choice if the aim is to encourage and give an impulse to students or teachers to reflect on their own practices (Poulou, 2001). Unfortunately, fictional vignettes cannot give any indication, which experiences the various participants made in school. The purpose of the vignettes that this article is based on is to explore the experiential moments of various school participants as they were co-experienced and written down by the researcher in order to make them fruitful for research. Vignettes are a tool for doing research on the experiences of the different people in an organization, in this case in schools. They are not fictional, artificially generated texts, like novels or poems (Ammann, 2017).

Below, I present a concrete example of a vignette, which was produced during a field visit to a hospital school as part of a research project. The hospital admits children and adolescents for long-term psychological treatment. It also provides in-patient speech and language therapy for children with severe stammers. The hospital school is a small institution in which around 139 (approximately 800 in a year) children are taught by 21 teachers. The aims of this type of school include enabling children and adolescents to catch up with lessons they have missed at their normal school and—if their psychological problems are rooted in attending school—to help reintegrate them into regular schooling. During this research project, vignettes were produced that reveal the plurality and complexity of educational leadership practices. The vignette describes an excursion into the city that the principal carried out with each new group of students admitted to the school. It was written based on notes taken during the excursion.

“That’s the university,” says Ms. Buch, pointing at the old, elongated building with her right hand. Michael, Thomas, Rudi and Dominique are gathered in a semicircle around the principal of the hospital school, who is taking them on a walk through the city. Ms. Buch is also the head of the learning group for the recently arrived students who have been admitted to the stammering clinic as in-patients. For five weeks, the four children will be undergoing in-patient stammering therapy in the afternoons and attending lessons at the hospital school in the mornings. It may be their last hope of being able to speak without anxiety. On this cold early winter morning, their hands are in their jackets, and their gazes are serious. Only Dominique is smiling, slightly embarrassed. “And in the summer the students like to sit on this big lawn here in front of the university and enjoy the sunshine,” Ms. Buch suddenly says. “And if you go on to study in the city too, perhaps one day you’ll be sitting on this lawn as well,” Ms. Buch continues in an enthusiastic tone of voice. Her eyes are sparkling. When Michael, Thomas, Rudi and Dominique hear her words, they flick their heads to the side. Their eyes widen a little and they exchange glances, nodding self-confidently.

This vignette attempts to capture the physical reactions of the students and the principal in a way that comes as close as possible to the researcher's experience. The vignette, as one possible form of organizational narration, and the co-experienced experiences described in it recreate for readers the experience of the scene and the educational leadership practices it involved.

The vignette above was documented by a researcher in the field and comprises a written impression of a single moment from the walk through the city. The language used in the vignette reveals the wealth of experiences perceived by the author. Vignettes can be distinguished from other forms of academic texts by their linguistic richness and pregnancy. In writing vignettes, researchers should ask themselves various questions to find the right words to describe what they have perceived. This is helpful for understanding and writing down the co-experienced experiences. How do the children react to the principal's remark? How are these reactions expressed? These are just two possible examples of guiding questions which play a crucial role in the writing of vignettes. Vignettes' linguistic richness is comparable to that of works of art or literature (cf. Ammann, 2017); ideally, it can inspire readers to reflect critically on their own pedagogical practice (Schwarz et al., 2013).

Writing Vignettes: Delving Into Experiences

Although vignettes can be compared to artworks, they are the result of empirically collected data. I will now show which factors play a key role when writing vignettes and how these texts are produced. Generally spoken, this chapter can be seen as a sort of "vignette didactics" that tries to give an idea and some guidelines, which steps a researcher should undertake, when he or she wants to write a vignette. Unfortunately, due to lack of space, these explanations can only give a glimpse and fragments of what it means to write a vignette and which attitude is necessary for writing. As example, the above presented vignette will be used, which came from a recent research project on educational leadership practices in successful schools and the effect of these practices on student learning. Over the course of the project, researchers visited a total of 28 schools that had taken part in a highly competitive school competition (with 100,000 euros of prize money for the highest ranked school) and come in the top six in their year of entry. The researchers spent 3 consecutive days at each school, collecting data by shadowing and guided interviews with principals, students, and teachers.

Shadowing is both a distinctive methodological research approach as well as a possible strategy within different methodologies, such as case study design and ethnography. (Bøe, Hognestad, & Wani-ganayake, 2017, p. 606)

Shadowing appears to be an effective strategy for collecting data for vignettes that are intended to capture experiential moments. By shadowing principals over an extended period, researchers can co-experience conversations (whether short or

long) between principals, teachers, and students and discussions with parents, principals' practices at conferences, and more. The duration of the period the researchers spend in schools should be several consecutive days in order to get familiar with the situations and the people involved—especially the principal and they get familiar with the researcher. In the current study, we have spent, due to budget reasons, 3 days in schools, which seem to be the lower limit of days. More consecutive days would have given us the chance to be deeper involved in the field and to learn more about the experiences of the people involved. Researchers enter the "experiential zones" (Rößler & Ammann, 2017) with the principals and attentively observe the participants' physical reactions. The attitude of the researcher during the process of shadowing is important. Doing phenomenological research is not only the way one sees the different scenes in the field. It is also a way of listening with conscious and deliberate intention in form of an opening of ourselves to the phenomena with their own textures and meaning (Moustakas, 1994). He or she has to be open-minded to the field and the interactions. In co-experiencing the experiences of the participants, the researcher does not follow a specific observation sheet or an observation focus. Acting as an expert in a court case needs a special way of attention too. An expert is usually highly experienced in his field, yet he or she has to be open-minded for the specific case and the way the case, for example, a car accident represents itself to the expert. The expert needs to be aware of his or her experience and first of all has to see how the facts present themselves in this case, trying to avoid interpretation from the beginning. The second step is the way the expert comes to his or her opinion. In this step, all the knowledge gained over time comes into play and is combined with the case itself. This procedure seems very similar to the way a researcher writes a vignette. The first step is writing the vignette, which needs very similar attention as an expert needs. The second step, where the expert comes to an opinion, represents the further work with the vignette in using them, for example, for gaining new theoretical insights, although there is never a final vignette as there is always the chance of another opinion in a court case. Another researcher or expert might have seen other things in the same experiential moment. Vignettes from this perspective are not precise in an objective sense, they are the result of a responsive co-experience moment.

Precious for writing down a vignette are the moments, which affect (e.g., memorable, peculiar, pleasing, disturbing, and curious situations) the researcher, in other words, the moments in which he is caught by the situation that starts him thinking and reflecting (Peterlini, 2017). This presents researchers with various challenges: They have to watch closely, listen carefully, and master the art of writing (Meyer-Drawe, 2012).

The challenge of writing up a phenomenological study is to capture the richness of experience in a holistic sense. (Klenke, 2008, p. 230)

The writing of the vignette quoted in this article was based on field notes written with the greatest possible vividness and with particular attention to the participants' physical reactions. There are different ways of writing down the first version of a vignette. Normally, the researcher cannot leave the situation and find a silent place to write down his or her observation. Usually, she or he stays close to the situation and has to deal with the different impressions. If there is a chance to leave the situation and to find a silent place, the researcher should take this opportunity. Helpful and practical in both cases is to write down everything that has been perceived in a research diary. When writing the vignette, the choice of stylistic devices is of key importance. Following the method of eidetic reduction (Groenewald, 2004; Husserl, 1962; Ueda & Sakugawa, 2009), researchers attempt to keep their written notes free of judgment and interpretation. This raises a fundamental question: What stance must researchers adopt in the field in order to capture these moments?

To enter the world of lived experiences through the world of language is to embark on an adventurous endeavor, which sometimes proves to be an amazing discovery as the meaning of an experience unfolds before our eyes, on paper or on the screen. However, there is an ironic paradox in writing for discovery: we discover nothing at all. (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009, p. 52)

According to the phenomenological perspective, interpreting and reflecting on one's experiences already constitutes an analysis of the situation (Klenke, 2008). Vignettes, by contrast, are intended to capture and describe the prereflective, co-experienced experiential moment. Moustakas (1994) points out that there are different angles of perception and each of them adds something new to the phenomenon observed. The role of the researcher in the process of co-experiencing and writing down the vignette is of high importance. As a researcher, you are full of your own experiences and even in trying to capture and describe the prereflective moment you pay to a certain degree direct attention.

Whatever is understood as the experience of the other person, the origin of this understanding lies in the own experiences. (Peterlini, 2017, p. 40)

Therefore the—what Husserl (1962) calls—*epoche* is highly relevant. Writing a vignette is a form of a phenomenological reduction aiming to describe in textural language what one sees as it appears, trying to leave the own interpretation out of the description. During this process of bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010), the researcher has to observe and describe, look once more, and describes once more, and, finally, he has to study again and describe again what he sees. To handle the possible researcher's bias, several stages of validation are important to deal with the challenge of writing the final vignette. The researchers begin with initial notes taken while observing the co-experienced scene.

For these purposes, researchers must stop observing childlike expressions from their anticipated end as if waiting for the

fulfillment of their expectations. The researcher is rather called upon to try to share children's experiences. (Meyer-Drawe, 2017, p. 18)

The notes describing this shared experience are written up into a raw vignette, which (in accordance with the criterion of communicative validation) is read back to research participants. The primary aim of this stage of validation is to ascertain whether the first draft accurately captures the situation, though this is not judged against typical standards of accuracy: The intention is not to reconstruct what (objectively) happened but to recreate the co-experienced experiences through the use of vivid language. The process of writing can be understood as a struggle with the researcher's language and thinking, as there is a constant search for words that might be better and more fitting. The idea is not to find a precise word, which describes the situation in form of a report. The aim of writing the vignette is to find words which have the potential to show how the situation was co-experienced and that affect the reader, in a very similar way as the researcher was affected during the situation. Following the initial stage of communicative validation, during which the research participants approve the content of the raw vignette, there is then a second stage of intersubjective validation within a group of researchers, in accordance with the criterion of investigator triangulation. In this group-based process, the raw vignette undergoes further linguistic validation. Each step of validation makes things clearer when they are considered again and again. Once more, the writer of the vignette has to ask himself, whether the descriptions in the vignettes show the situation as it appeared to him or her during the phase of co-experiencing. Under the careful eyes of his or her coresearchers, he or she has to face the questions he already asked himself. Researchers critically examine the expressions and phrasing: How and in what form have the experiences co-experienced by the researcher been articulated? Did he or she use the right words to describe what he or she has perceived? Did he or she stay with the experience as it was co-experienced? Did he or she take different angles and which one to look on the vignette? These are just a few exemplary questions the researcher has to answer once more during this last step of validation. Summing up the following, recommendations (Rathgeb-Weber, Krenn, & Schratz, 2017) are helpful when writing a vignette:

- Perspective: The vignette describes the experience from a "lernseits" perspective of the person co-experienced.
- Affecting moment: The moment the researcher was "caught" (affected) is visible in the vignette.
- Phenomenology of the living body: The vignette describes the bodily expression of the people involved in the situation.
- Show: The idea of the vignette is to show the co-experienced situation and not to report in form of an objective observation sheet.
- Closeness: Try to be as close, as possible to the situation and the experience of the participants.

To a certain degree, these points can act as quality criteria for a final validation of the vignette. Only after the conclusion of this validation stage, it is possible to speak of a phenomenological vignette, which can subsequently be the object of further analysis or used for applications such as mentoring or school improvement (cf. Ammann, Westfall-Greiter, & Schratz, 2017).

On Further Work With Vignettes: Limitations

This article has attempted to present a theoretical argument for how vignettes can empirically document leadership for learning as experience, using the example of a vignette from a recent research project. Vignettes attempt to articulate school participants' experiential moments in words, so that they can be fruitful objects for further analysis. From a phenomenological perspective, these experiential moments can be viewed as starting points for learning, and hence, the results of leadership for learning can also be seen in the experiences of those being led. However, vignettes also have certain limitations.

Firstly, it is not possible to draw generalizable, representative conclusions from vignettes. They describe highly individual and personal experiential moments that cannot be generalized and are not intended to be and hence cannot be used as the basis for objective, universally valid theories.

If they are written in accordance with the procedure described above, vignettes have great potential for further work or analysis. However, this procedure demands great patience. It is also crucial to have a form of more explored guidelines setting out key principles of style and language (Rößler & Ammann, 2017), and although writing vignettes is an art, it is one that has to follow certain rules. To ensure sustained quality control, it is essential to adhere to certain linguistic standards and constantly question how and in what form individual experiences have been articulated. Moustakas (1994) puts it in a nutshell:

The task requires that I look and describe; (...) always with reference to textural qualities—rough and smooth; small and large; quiet and noisy; colourful and bland; hot and cold; stationary and moving; high and low; squeezed in and expansive; fearful and courageous; angry and calm—descriptions that present varying intensities; ranges of shapes, sizes, and special qualities; time references; and colors all within an experiential context. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90-91)

Like other organizational narratives that attempt to capture the unvarnished reality of a situation, vignettes need to be written in an appropriate form that refrains from making interpretations (Angelides et al., 2004). Finally, working with actual co-experienced scenes from everyday school life can pose serious ethical challenges. As has been argued in this article, that processes of learning which originate from experiences can be painful as well as joyful. These painful moments may be due to activities that participants feel ashamed of when they look

back at their own actions through the lens of vignettes. Communicative validation appears to be an effective way of allowing research participants to approve the vignettes. It must also be ensured that the vignettes are anonymized and that it is not possible to identify the specific school or any of the research participants.

Conclusions

Working with vignettes opens up a range of opportunities and applications that can be broken down into at least three categories: Vignettes can serve as feedback tools, as development tools, or as tools for studying educational leadership (Ammann et al., 2017). As a feedback tool, vignettes are intended to encourage participants to reflect on the possible consequences of their own actions and to draw conclusions about future actions. Vignettes capture the moment of the experience and the phatic expressions of the participants, which was probably not recognized by the actors in the moment itself. This surplus (Meyer-Drawe, 2012) of the vignettes offers the chance to get new and other inspiring insights in the own actions, which is probably not offered by other forms of narrative research. Presenting principals with descriptions of their actions as co-experienced by a third party allows them to engage in a process of reflection that will either reinforce existing practices or result in changes (Rößler & Ammann, 2017). For example, the discussion about the example vignette presented in this article demonstrated to the principal the additional benefits such walks through the city can bring and reinforced her belief in their value.

As a development tool, meanwhile, vignettes can be used in processes of collegial exchange and dialogue at team meetings or pedagogical workshops, thereby helping to instigate new projects or extensions of existing ones. For example, reading the vignette quoted in this article could prompt discussions about how a short walk through the city could (almost in passing) reveal potential future opportunities to students with low self-confidence and thus have a formative character.

By capturing the experiential moments initiated by educational leadership practices in written form, vignettes enable readings that uncover the diverse phenomena inherent in these moments. A reading is a form of phenomenological data interpretation that deliberately refrains from using existing theories to analyze the scene and instead attempts to ascertain what the scene reveals about a particular phenomenon (Ammann, 2017). For example, it is possible to carry out a reading of the vignette presented in this article that focuses on the phenomena of time and space.

Finally, vignettes offer great potential for collecting data on the activities of the different people in schools, therefore also principals. If vignettes are used in a mixed-methods approach in combination with methods such as questionnaires or documentary analysis, they can enable researchers to get close to participants' experiences with principals and how they resonate on their activities. Regarding the literature, we know many of the tasks that principals have and the competences they should

have. In fact, there is less knowledge about the things they really do. In addition to classical observation methods, vignettes have the potential to capture the activities on the one side and the experiences people have with principals on the other side. Vignettes offer the potential to make these “Leadership experiences” visible to others. Vignettes thus open up a new, supplementary perspective not previously available to researchers, in which the traces that leadership practices have left on school participants are revealed.

Author’s Note

This article is part of the project “Von den Besten lernen: Lernwirksames Schulleitungshandeln an ausgezeichneten Schulen des Deutschen Schulpreises” that has received funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Acknowledgments

The article benefited from discourses within the Innsbruck-based research group and in particular from the helpful discussions with its members Niels Anderegg, Alexander Bergmann, Malte Gregorzewski, Werner Mauersberg, Veronika Möltner, and Michael Schratz. Especially, I would like to thank Werner Mauersberg for his support during writing this article and in finalizing it. Finally I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments that greatly contributed to improving the final version of the paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article is part of the project “Von den Besten lernen: Lernwirksames Schulleitungshandeln an ausgezeichneten Schulen des Deutschen Schulpreises” that has received funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

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