CHAPTER 6

ENGAGEMENT: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC APPROACH

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Abstract

Phenomenography is a means for mapping "qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them," (Marton 1986). What is particularly valuable about a phenomenographic approach is that it allows for the comparison and contrast of individual conceptions of a phenomenon, allowing for fresh perspectives outside of established paradigmatic accounts. Therefore, it would be appropriate to use a phenomenographic approach to explore the relationship between policy and practice within the Queensland context in relation to student engagement in learning. Since teachers will ultimately put policy documents into practice, is it important to establish what they know about these documents, how they conceptualise engagement and what actions they take to promote the engagement the policies stipulate. This paper provides a rationale for a current research project based on a phenomenographic approach.

INTRODUCTION

"Teachers at all levels, from elementary through postsecondary classrooms, are always concerned with increasing student engagement and learning. They often wonder why some students are involved, engaged, and motivated for schoolwork and others are disengaged and apathetic, even when the students are in the same classroom. This is a chronic problem in education and will continue to be one."

(Linnenbrink and Pintrich 2003, p. 119)

'Engagement' is promoted as the solution to some major contemporary problems facing education. These include student alienation (Australian Curriculum Studies Association 1996) and early school leaving (Queensland Government 2002). The concept of engagement is being used extensively in educational policy and professional development documents and is fast becoming an academic research focus. While there is a sizable literature about engagement, different writers and groups construct it in unique and sometimes contradictory ways. If the concept is to be useful,

work must be done to examine existing work on engagement which policy makers, educational practitioners and academics can draw on in order to further reforms and research

The concept of engagement became widely used in the late 70s and early 80s throughout western educational literature. As early as 1980, John Smyth observed that, 'pupil engagement' was, "beginning to pervade the advocacy literature and gain general acceptance as educational jargon" (p. 225). Engagement as a concept grew from literature which identified time-on-task and attention as markers of student and teacher success (Cobb 1972; McKinney, Mason et al. 1975). McKinney et al (1975, p. 202) laid the groundwork for the early concept of engagement, citing that, ".....the child who is attentive, independent and task-orientated in his interaction with peers is more likely to succeed academically than the child who is distractible, dependent and passive in peer group activities." Good and Beckerman (1978, p 193), in their study of time on task in sixth grade classrooms, began to shape the discourse of engagement by claiming that, "If pupils are to master material, they must engage in it and react to it..." In addition to claiming engagement was necessary for mastery learning, they also used engagement as a descriptor of an on task student in their coding, stating, "when the term *definitely involved* is used, it suggests that there is clear evidence that the pupil is engaged in the assigned task" (p. 194).

These early conceptions of engagement were linked to a fundamental shift in thinking about educational research. Rosenshine and Berliner (1978, p.4) noted that research was moving from a focus on teacher behaviours to a concern with student variables, and at the time cited Carroll (1963) and Bloom (1976) as catalysts for this transformation in thinking.

Over the past three decades, the conceptualisation of engagement has changed, reflecting increased academic rigour in research and a growth in understanding about the social contexts which affect learning. While the initial conceptualisations of engagement were focused around attention and time on task, modern theories diverge sharply.

ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Large numbers of educational policy documents in Australia and around the world include the concept of engagement within descriptions of new policies and programs (Finn and Voelkl 1993, p. 265). In the preface to an Australian publication, *From alienation to engagement: Opportunities for reform in the middle years of schooling*, Ross Free observes, "the focus now is on developing a new philosophy or culture of schooling which will fully engage young people, rather than the 'bricks and mortar' issues

associated with creating middle schools" (Australian Curriculum Studies Association 1996, p. vi). A typical example of the kind of policy statement to which Free refers can be found in the Queensland State Government White Paper, Education and Training Reforms for the Future. According to the White Paper, "...this reform is about engaging young people in learning" (Queensland Government 2002, p. 7). In this vein, the Queensland Senior English Syllabus rationale states that "...students will engage with a wide variety of literary, mass media and everyday texts" and one of its global aims it to "...develop students' creative and critical engagement with texts" (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2002, p. 1 and p. 4). While these policy documents acknowledge the generally accepted link between engagement and learning, at present, it is unclear exactly how engagement is defined and how people will identify and measure it.

THE CONCEPT OF ENGAGEMENT WITHIN ACADEMIC LITERATURE

The academic community is divided on what student engagement means and how it should be categorised. This disagreement within the literature has invited some negative assessments of the concept. Some academics question if 'engagement' exists in any definitive sense, and ask if it is merely an invented construct that serves as a kind of magic bullet or cure all for current challenges facing education. Others wonder if engagement simply functions as a gloss for conditions associated with diverse factors ranging from levels of student motivation to the impact of social disadvantage on learning outcomes. McMahon and Portelli state that it has become a "...popular, but at times,...empty and superficial, catch-phrase or slogan," because of its lack of theoretical grounding (2004, p. 60).

Most definitions consider engagement as one dimensional, focusing on engagement primarily as either a *behavioural*, *psychological*, *social* or *cognitive* construct. These perspectives, however, are often criticised as being too simplistic. Greenwood, Horton and Utley (2002, p. 328) consider engagement to be tied directly to identifiable, observable school behaviours, a belief that underpins their intervention program for Title 1 primary schools. They state that "academic engagement refers to a composite of specific classroom behaviours: writing, participating in tasks, reading aloud, reading silently, talking about academics, and asking and answering questions." To be successfully engaged by this definition, one must attend to and participate in the activities occurring within the classroom. This links conceptually to literature identifying the benefits of participation and time on task on learning outcomes (McKinney, Mason et al. 1975).

This conception is challenged by Pope (2001), who cites examples of 'good' students who display these characteristics and behaviours because

they know what schools and teachers expect from them. Pope paints a bleak picture of how 'top' achievers often manipulate the school system to gain teacher favour and high marks, yet remain intellectually and emotionally detached from school. This brings into question if students displaying the characteristics listed above are truly engaged in learning. Because of the one dimensional nature of this conception, it becomes easier to find exceptions to their rule which undermine the effectiveness of their position.

Other academics look at engagement from a psychological perspective. Shernoff et al (2003, p. 158), working from the perspective of flow theory, state that student engagement is "...based on the culmination of concentration, interest and enjoyment." Jones (2001, p. 26) also focuses on interest and enjoyment, stressing the importance of fostering curiosity and a child's desire to learn in his concept of engagement, placing these qualities above test scores in importance. Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn (1992, p. 12) state, "We define student engagement in academic work as the student's psychological investment in and effort directed towards learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote."

However, Miller et al (1996) are sceptical of conceptions like those of Shernoff et al and Jones on the grounds that interest and enjoyment will not always be present when students (or anyone for that matter) are learning. They argue that teachers, parents and administrators should accept that students will not be intrinsically motivated in all subjects, and students should be encouraged to value learning for utilitarian reasons when intrinsic motivation is lacking. While teachers should strive to make subjects interesting and relevant for students, many would agree that it is unrealistic to believe that all students will find every necessary subject intrinsically motivating. The definition offered by Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn is perhaps the most useful of this group since it defines engagement as the investment put into mastering learning, instead of using enjoyment and interest as qualifications.

Other researchers link engagement to the student's social context. Newman (1998, p. 91), states that engagement "results both from the quality of the instructional setting and from the level of social support from peers, parents, and the community beyond school." Moje (2000, p. 66) believes that teachers are able to engage their students "by connecting to them personally and by challenging them to learn content concepts and literacy skills." Anderson et al (2004) stress the importance of a caring relationship with an adult to fostering school engagement, noting that engagement is the only 'at risk' student variable which is able to be changed.

By contrast, Skinner and Belmont (1993, p. 572) point out that "[e]ducators have plausibly wondered whether it is likely that students who feel good about being in school may nevertheless fail to learn anything." While they believe that the results of their study of teacher behaviour on student engagement show a correlation between positive views of school and student academic success, the preceding statement links to debates about issues such as curriculum standards. Some argue that standards have dropped in an effort to make students feel more successful. Social support such as praise can be misguided as well as Alfie Kohn pointed out in an interview with Ron Brandt (1995, p. 15) stating, "...praise for success at relatively easy tasks sends a message that this child must not be very bright." Also, while a supportive social context will help students feel secure within their school environment, this feeling of belonging may not always lead to positive academic results. As Lamborn, Brown et al (1992) noted, belonging to certain peer groups can actually negatively impact on school achievement.

Miller et al (1996) and Roeser, Strobel and Quihuis (2002, p. 346) offer definitions of engagement which draw on cognitive principles; their definitive signs of engagement are self regulation, persistence and deep strategy usage (1996, p. 417). This view is supported by the research of Ainley (1993), which indicated that female students who used deep level learning strategies achieved better results than peers with the same level of ability who used a surface approach to learning. Roeser, Strobel and Quihuis (2002) likewise look to the use of learning and metacognitive strategies as the primary sign of engagement. In addition, however, they examine how attentional distraction caused by moods affects this, making links to the emotional state on the level of engagement. Of all of the one dimensional approaches to education, the cognitive perspective is less susceptible to criticism. Cognitive strategy use is generally accepted as desirable; nonetheless, it is difficult to know with confidence that a student is using these deep level strategies. This makes it very difficult for teachers to know when this level of engagement has truly been achieved.

While the preceding researchers characterised one or two dimensions of engagement, the most cited work on engagement, Finn's 1989 article about withdrawal from school, creates a three level taxonomy of engagement (also referred to as 'participatory behaviours'). This model is more complex than the preceding accounts. Level one engagement consists of a basic acquiescence to school rules, linking loosely to the behavioural definitions discussed above. Level two engagement occurs when, "students initiate questions and dialogue with the teacher and display enthusiasm by their expenditure of extra time in the classroom before, during or after school, or by doing more class work or homework than is required"(Finn 1989, p. 128). This level draws primarily on psychological aspects of engagement. Level three is achieved when the student begins to participate in the social,

extracurricular and athletic aspects of the school, a characteristic which has been proven to improve school retention rates, connecting to the social aspects of engagement discussed above (Finn and Rock 1997; Fullarton 2002).

While this taxonomy is useful for capturing most of the factors academics claim underpin engagement, cognitive aspects are notably missing. Hypothetically, it is possible for a student to be enthusiastic, follow the rules and participate heavily in school life and still learn little; if the tasks the student is being asked to complete are not academically challenging, educationally significant learning may not be occurring.

Anderson et al (2004) constructed a framework that synthesises even more perspectives on engagement, drawing on work by Connell and Wellborn (1991) and the works by Finn discussed above. Their paper describes their intervention, the Check and Connect program, designed to foster student engagement in primary and middle school for at-risk students. Their intervention was based on their own conception of engagement and literature about building resilience and competence in children. They believe that four types of engagement exist, 'behavioural (e.g., participation- classroom and extra curricular, attendance), academic (i.e., time on task, academic learning time), cognitive (e.g. self-regulated learning, student responsibility, use of learning strategies to complete a task), and psychological (i.e., sense of belonging, relationships with teachers and peers)' (Anderson, Christenson et al. 2004, p. 110). This framework adds to those explored above by linking the types of together within one model. This is perhaps the most complete model linking current theories of engagement, although conspicuously absent are references to motivation and more specific explanations of what 'learning strategies' they are referring to.

Some authors advance constructions of student engagement within accounts that criticise even the synthesised conception of engagement above. Shernoff (2001, p. 45-46) claims engagement is a function of:

1) Phenomenological factors- experience of challenge and skill, autonomy, relevance and activity level

2) Classroom factors- whole class vs. small group, teacher lecture vs. 'doing,' evaluation and feedback, and school subject matter.

3) Individual factors- background, ability, grade level and family challenge and support

4) School factors- socioeconomic status of the school community, school support and challenge and school wide use of instructional methods.

This definition constructs engagement as a condition influenced strongly by external factors (teachers, community) and inherent personal qualities. While many would argue that these factors and qualities do significantly influence engagement, this model is highly deterministic and may advance over-simplistic explanation for why some groups of students succeed and other fail. Research on resilience has found that students can and do overcome obstacles posed by school and individual factors. Finn and Rock (1997) noted that academic engagement actual can explain student success and failure after background and psychological characteristics have been controlled statistically. Therefore, engagement can and does exist independent of individual and school factors.

A completely different way of classifying definitions of student engagement is advanced by McMahon and Portelli (2004). They recognise three theoretical positions underpinning definitions of engagement. The first, the conservative or traditional approach, identifies correlation between engagement and academic achievement and contains both behavioural and psychological components. McMahon and Portelli point out, however, that the criteria for academic success under this model are determined solely by the teacher. They critique work by Strong et al, Newmann et al, and Steinburg, arguing that 'these theoreticians do not question what is learned, the reason for learning it, or whose meanings are being learned' (McMahon and Portelli 2004, p. 63). Accordingly, McMahon and Portelli maintain that this position is too linear and limited.

The second theoretical position is the liberal or student oriented approach. This stance widens the notion of engagement from the strictly behavioural and psychological components, adding a social context as well. This section acknowledges that the work by authors such as Finn and Voelkl (1993), Cothran and Ennis (2000) and Deiro (1997, cited in McMahon and Portelli 2004) moves forward from the traditional viewpoint referring to student voices and broadening the possibilities for what counts as success. However, McMahon and Portelli (2004, p. 69) claim that this perspective still falls short of being compelling in that it does not, '...question the purpose of engagement or the implicit assumption that the purpose of education is to preserve the existing social order.'

The final theoretical position is the critical-democratic approach to engagement. They state that, 'engagement is generated through the interactions of students and teachers, in a shared space, for the purpose of democratic reconstruction, through which personal transformation takes place' (McMahon and Portelli 2004, p. 70). Citing examples of democratic pedagogy (Portelli and Vibert 2002) and drawing heavily on the work of authors like Freire and hooks, they argue that a truly engaging learning experience will be transformational. They contend that it is only through learning experiences which expose the dominant social order and challenge

inequalities within it that meaningful and valuable learning will take place. This structure requires not only engaged students, but engaged teachers and an engaged community all working together for social justice.

The work by McMahon and Portelli is an important step forward for the concept of engagement because for the first time engagement is linked explicitly to identifiable theoretical positions. I agree that a truly engaging educational experience is transformational, in the sense that a student goes from 'I can't' to 'I can.' However, their final and preferred theoretical approach is contestable from a valuative standpoint. Undoubtedly the current curriculum has political overtones; this has been well described by academics such as Bernstein (1990) in his discussion of the visible and invisible pedagogies operating within curriculum. While inequality must be tackled frequently through school curriculum, the fight for social justice doesn't need to underpin all learning experiences for students to engage with the curriculum being taught. School communities must create cultures that push for the rights of oppressed groups. At the same time, this issue must be tackled very sensitively so certain students do not feel targeted unjustly as 'oppressors' on account of their class, race or gender which is tantamount to generating reverse racism and discrimination.

At the outset of this study, I have aligned myself provisionally with the second theoretical position, the liberal or student oriented approach to engagement. This position is closely linked with the preferred models discussed earlier like those proposed by Anderson et al (2004) and Finn (1989). It is important, however, to emphasise that this is a provisional positioning. The current project will yield a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of engagement on the basis of which it will be possible to arrive at a more definitive theoretical stance.

THE PROBLEM

As the literature above demonstrates, there is little consensus within the academic/research community about what it means for a student to be engaged. In the presence of such varying views, there is a risk of the documents being 'misinterpreted' (relative to the ideals of the policy makers) or falling prey to a multitude of different and possibly contradictory applications. In order to try to help minimise the risk of gaps between policy and practice, it is necessary to come to a better understanding of what is meant by the term engagement and how it can be identified in schools. Given the division of beliefs within the academic community, it is unrealistic to expect consensus on this issue. There are, however, other ways to move towards clarifying this issue.

As Queensland teachers are the practitioners who must implement these reforms centred on engagement, it may be helpful to understand how they interpret debates surrounding engagement and identify the kinds of personal

beliefs they hold about what engagement is and how best to pursue. It may prove useful to answer the question:

What are the qualitatively different ways which Education Queensland secondary school teachers construct and measure student engagement in their own teaching practice?

This chapter describes a study in progress to answer this question. The data collection for this study comprises of interviews with approximately Education Queensland teachers in the Central Queensland region which will subsequently be analysed using the phenomenographic method. The outcome of this project will be a conceptual framework of engagement based on the conceptions of engagement held by teachers in the region.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHENOMENOGRAPHY

The word phenomenography is a compound word derived from two roots: phenomenon and graph. Kroksmark (1987, cited in Marton and Booth 1997, p. 110) states that etymologically:

> Phenomenon comes from the Greek verb fainesqai (fainesthai) which means to appear, or to become manifest, and gives the noun fainemonon which means the apparent, or that which manifests itself. The verb comes from fainw (faino) which means to bring to light or to elicit, the fa- stem implying approximately that which can be revealed or made apparent. The concept of phenomenon must therefore be taken to mean that which appears in its own right, or that which is manifest.... Graph also comes from the Greek, from the verb grafia (graphy), which means to describe in words or pictures that which designates, for example, an aspect of reality or an experience of reality. In combination with phenomenon, graphy becomes the act of representing an object of study as a qualitatively distinct phenomenon.

This detailed etymology highlights the fundamental goal of the research approach, 'graphing' the diverse manifestations of experiences of phenomena.

Therefore, phenomenography is concerned with "....mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them" (Marton 1986). According to Marton (2000, p. 105), a phenomenon is defined as "the thing as it appears to us," allowing a broad range of experiences and perceptions to be explored through

phenomenography. Consequently, phenomenography would seem to be a well suited approach to investigating my research question because it will allow me to 'graph' the differing perspectives, conceptions and understandings of engagement held by practising teachers. Phenomenographic research methods will allow me to find perceptions of engagement which may exist outside of conventional paradigms put forward by policy documents, academic research and 'expert' opinions.

The research approach developed from investigations of learning by Ference Marton, Rojer Saljo and Lars-Owe Dahlegren in the late 1970s. They sought to answer two research questions: "(a) What does it mean to say that some people are better at learning than others? (b) Why are some people better at learning than others?" (Marton, 1994, p. 4424). They wanted to take as little for granted as possible and explore how different people perceived what they were learning and how their unique strategies and values affected their retention of the material.

They coined the name phenomenography for their methodology in 1979, and Marton published his definitive article on it in 1981. Marton's (1981) original paper laid out the framework for phenomenography, but as the methodology has developed and evolved, there has been further refinement. In 1986, Marton refined the definition of phenomenography above stating that it:

> ... implies that phenomenography is not concerned solely with the phenomena that are experienced and thought about, or with the human beings who are experiencing or thinking about the phenomena. Nor is phenomenography concerned with perception and though as abstract phenomena, wholly separate from the subject matter of though and perception. Phenomenography is concerned with the relations that exist between human beings and the world around them (p. 31).

The statement above reflects the ontological non-dualist perspective which underpins phenomenographical research. This perspective argues that the subject and object (phenomenon) are linked, not separate, existing together in a space which is both subjective and objective. Therefore, "....experiences, conceptions, understandings, etc., (terms which I have used interchangeably) refer to subject-object relations of an internal nature. Our world is a world which is always understood in one way or in another, it can not be defined without someone defining it." (Marton 2000, p. 115).

Phenomenography, therefore, is concerned with 'graphing' these subject-object relationships, categorising these experiences, conceptions, understandings and perceptions. Marton believes that there are a "limited number of qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena, and aspects of, the world around us are experienced, conceptualized, understood,

perceived, and apprehended" (Marton 1994, p. 4424). This implies that there are a finite number of categories possible to find within the data. Marton calls these groupings 'categories of description.' These are logically related to each other and form hierarchies in relation to given criteria, and he refers to the ordered set of categories of description as the 'outcome space' of the phenomenon. He believes these categories can be arranged hierarchically based on the assumption that some conceptions can be viewed as '...more advanced, more complex, or more powerful than other capabilities' (Marton and Booth 1997, p. 111).

Today, phenomenographic studies investigate diverse research terrain. Studies including secondary teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning(Boulton-Lewis, Smith et al. 2001), organisational change (Dunkin 2000), employee views on continued learning in the workplace (Gerber, Lankshear et al. 1995), patients conceptions of how health processes are promoted in mental health nursing (Svedberg, Jormfeldt et al. 2003) and even conceptions of phenomenography itself (Trigwell 2000). To allow for this diversity of investigation three lines of phenomenographic research are currently being used. These include:

1) subject-related studies of general aspects of learning that explore difference between learning process and learning outcomes and compare approaches and strategies with outcomes

2) studies of learning within a certain content domain such as maths, physics etc.

3) investigations of 'pure' phenomenographic interest which strive to understand how people conceive different aspects of their reality (Dall'Alba 2000, p. 83-84)

The first two lines of research link directly with the original phenomenographic studies to investigate the how (How do these students study?) and what (What is the students conception of subject matter?) of learning (Prosser 2000, p. 34). The third line of research was developed to allow those studying areas other than learning to apply phenomenography's ontological non-dualist perspective to other more diverse research topics. It has greatly widened the scope of phenomenographic inquiry, allowing it to apply to phenomena in any field.

It is this third line of research which will be useful to expand as it has the potential to explore extremely diverse research terrain. As stated previously, a phenomenon can be defined as the way one perceives or experiences an object, allowing this methodology to be applied to virtually all human experiences, including human experiences of engagement. It is this line that I wish to further through the current study, expanding the scope of subjects currently under investigation using phenomenography,

while simultaneously allowing myself to gather the qualitatively different perspectives teachers hold on engagement.

PERFORMING PHENOMENOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

To gather data to create these categories of description, the phenomenographic method uses primarily interviews with open-ended questions. Unlike other research methods though, questions should not be too detailed and few should be written in advance of the interview; questions must follow what the subject has to say. To enhance a phenomenographic studies, it is also possible to use group interviews, observations, drawings, written responses, artefacts and historical documents.

Within the questionnaire or semi-structured interview formats most popular to this research method, first questions can ask the subject to define the phenomenon, inquire about a time when the subject experienced the phenomenon or utilise a text as stimulus and examine a participant's response to it (Marton 1994, p. 4428). For example, in Loughland et al.'s (2002, p 191) study of young people's perspectives on environmental education, they had students complete the open ended statement 'I think the word environment means....' on their questionnaire to elicit student definitions. Another study completed by Johansson, Marton and Svensson (1995, cited in Marton 1988, p. 176) asked university students studying mechanics the question, 'A car is driven at high, constant speed straight forward on a highway. What forces act on the car?' and based their study around the different ways of thinking that the students used to solve the problem.

After this initial question or prompt, the interview should be 'non-directive' in style (Walsh 2000, p. 19). This flexible structure exists because most researchers view phenomenography as a process of discovery, not an experiment. Phenomenographic researchers do not to go into a study with a set hypothesis in mind, seeking to 'test' if their preconceived categories exist. Rather, they must start with data they collect and then, through rigorous analysis, organise it into the categories which form the outcome space. Open ended questions are useful for this purpose as they allow the subject to speak freely about the phenomenon, reducing the risk of the interviewer guiding the interviewee to specific responses.

Marton and Booth (1997, p. 130) utilise the concept of discourse to explain how these interviews work on two levels to gather new knowledge, suitable for 'discovery.' They state that the interview is a situation of interpersonal contact and is similar to a social discourse in structure on one level. However, on a second level it is a therapeutic discourse which is liberating the subject of reflections which have often been previously unreleased. It is this second level which helps elicit new knowledge about the way the

phenomenon is experienced which the researcher can use to accurately record the subject's experiences with the phenomenon.

Once the data have been collected, the process of analysis must be extremely vigorous and transparent (Francis 1993; Bruce 2002). The majority of criticism of the methodology stems from concerns about how individual researchers conduct their analysis. When analysing data, the researcher must:

a) transcribe verbatim

b) bracket preconceived ideas

c) not judge whether the responses accurately describe the phenomenon, instead compare/contrast perceptions

d) identify each distinct way of viewing the phenomenon

e) cut information which does not relate to the person's perception of the phenomenon.

f) study data for MEANING, not necessarily what has actually been said

g) look at data for both collective and individual meaning

h) identify what the critical attributes and distinguishing features between the groups creating 'categories of description'.

i) create a hierarchical order of these categories, known as the 'outcome space'. (Marton 1994, p. 4428)

These steps are based on the idea that the researcher is the 'learner' rather than the expert (Marton and Booth 1997, p. 132). The non-dualist ontology is also important to remember; throughout analysis the subject and object must not be separated. Some of these steps are specifically designed to minimise subjectivity on the part of the researcher. Bracketing preconceived ideas helps researchers identify their own subjectivity in the analysis, important so the data is not unwittingly manipulated by predetermined conception/s. As Kate Patrick (2000, p. 133) points out, bracketing preconceived ideas is the process of becoming open to the implications of the data by, "becoming conscious of one's expectations and actively challenging them!" This means that a researcher must take time to identify pre-existing ideas about the data so these assumptions do not cloud the actual interpretation of the data. To further separate existing assumptions from the data, accuracy is not judged because it would force researchers to apply their own values and beliefs about what is right or wrong to the data, hampering attempts at objectivity.

Other steps are included to ensure that the research is accurately recording the lived experiences of the participants. Throughout the analytical process,

researchers should work in teams of two or more to promote objectivity (Walsh 2000). Each researcher must be explicit on his/her input into the analysis and allow other researchers to check, test and probe initial results. This cross-examination helps keep results more true to the data. Transcribing the subject's responses verbatim forces the researchers to analyse exactly what the subject has said. By identifying each distinct way of viewing the phenomenon, the researchers are not marginalising minority viewpoints held by few respondents in favour of those held by a larger group. This process acknowledges the diversity of responses.

To get a broad sense of the understandings underpinning an individual subject's response, each transcript is read multiple times. After several readings, the researcher is allowed to exclude passages which do not relate to the phenomenon being studied. As analysis continues, the researchers must deal with the transcript as a whole and looking for embedded meaning in the context rather than extracting passages out to form 'pools of meaning.' Pulling quotations out risks losing the true intended meaning of the statements (Bowden 2000, p. 12). In their analysis of the interview transcript, the researchers must identify both the way the phenomenon has been experienced and the way this experience has been expressed (Marton and Booth 1997). Separating these two allows researchers to accurately compare different responses; while the way an experience has been expressed may differ, the way of experiencing the phenomenon must have been the same in order to allow responses to occupy the same 'category of description.'

Once the data have been analysed for individual meaning, it is then compared and contrasted with data from other subjects to create a collective meaning. While all subjects will speak about their experiences in different ways, the researchers must look for the subjects' meanings to differentiate between expression and experience. The categories used to classify the different experiences are termed 'categories of description' because they should accurately describe the way the individual or group of individuals has experienced the phenomenon. After categories have been established, two or more researchers must discuss the initial set of categories and edit them so they more closely match a logical framework while still remaining true to the data (Prosser 2000). These categories are organised in a hierarchy from simple to complex conceptions.

This final model is referred to as the outcome space. Once the outcome space is constructed, the phenomenographic part of the study is completed and the rest of the data organization and explanation is dictated by the rules of the particular field. The categories should be able to be applied to similar situations, but the entire process is not necessarily replicable.

MOVING FORWARD

This chapter justifies a current study of the conceptions of engagement held by a study population of approximately 25 Central Queensland secondary school teachers. Structurally, it is similar in design to a study of teacher conceptions of teaching and learning completed by Boulton-Lewis et al. (2001). They completed a phenomenographic study of 24 secondary school teachers from two schools in Brisbane and analysed data from one initial and one follow up interview. This study was able to identify four categories of teaching and four categories of learning as described by the participants. Also helpful to shaping this study is Christine Bruce's doctoral thesis (1996). In her thesis, she tackled the challenging and somewhat nebulous topic of information literacy, employing phenomenographic methods. She gained much of her data from semi-structured interviews with librarians and other experts on information literacy. I will be utilising a similar structure and adapting some of her questions to suit my topic of inquiry.

My study will be seeking to identify teachers' different conceptions of engagement and the correspondingly different ways teachers attempt to engage students in their schools to meet current policy objectives. This information will be useful as it will allow policy makers to better understand the ways that teachers view engagement and how teachers in turn understand and implement policies. Teachers will also be able to find out how their colleagues conceptualise engagement and implement policies, information that could be utilised to create more consistency within teacher practice.

Through this study, I will also be able to contribute to the methodology of phenomenography. As mentioned above, while initially phenomenography was concerned primarily with the how (how do these students study) and what (what is the students conception of subject matter), it can be used to examine any relationship between a subject and phenomenon. By utilising this research methodology, I will be contributing to the development of this third line of phenomenographical studies by examining teacher conceptions of engagement (phenomenon). The study described in this chapter pushes into new research terrain by focusing on a concept (engagement) rather than adopting the more conventional focus on 'learning' that most phenomenographic research in education utilises. Also, it will examine teacher perceptions of educational policy, branching out into the political sphere of education. This study will provide a base for future investigations into engagement and its relationship to policy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Colin Lankshear, Professor Richard Smith and an anonymous peer reviewer for their critical feedback and comments on this chapter.

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