

Variations in the Experience of Phenomenographic Research

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Introduction

Phenomenography originated in the field of Education in the 1970s. At this time, a series of studies were designed to understand why some students appeared to learn more deeply and easily than others (Marton, 1994, Marton & Säljö, 1976). The researchers gathered the different conceptualizations described by the research participants, analyzed their similarities and differences, and noticed that what emerged was a qualitatively limited number of ways of conceptualizing phenomenon. Further, they discovered that these conceptualizations were structurally and referentially related and that these relationships could be mapped hierarchically forming what became known as outcome spaces (Dahlin, 2007). In general, phenomenography aims to find the “variation and the architecture of this variation in terms of different aspects that define the phenomena” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 117). Since those early days, phenomenographic methodology has been used in a variety of ways, sometimes combining it with of secondary methods. Hasselgren and Beach list (1997) identify five different types of phenomenography: experimental, discursive (pure), naturalistic, hermeneutic, and phenomenological.

The aim of this symposium is to discuss the variation in ways that phenomenography can be applied to research in networked learning. A secondary goal is to open a discussion on the issues and challenges presented by this methodology. The four authors of the papers for this symposium have all taken a discursive (pure) phenomenological approach to their research. What this means is that rather than taking an experimental approach in which learning outcomes were analyzed and measured, as in the experimental approach, the researchers examine conceptions outside of active intervention. That is, the researchers examine how learners conceptualize phenomena occurring in the general learning environment. The papers are:

- 1 Souleles, N., Phenomenography and E-Learning in Art and Design
- 2 Bonzo, J., A Social Media Networked Learning Ecology Perspective
- 3 Costello, J., Perceptions of Guest Lecturer’s Impact on Online Learning Community
- 4 Koole, M., A Social Constructionist Approach to Phenomenographic Analysis of Identity Positioning in Networked Learning

The first paper provides a comprehensive definition of phenomenography. In it, Souleles describes how he used phenomenography to examine the perceptions and practices of interviewed lecturers in undergraduate art and design. He, then, briefly describes the resulting outcome space and how phenomenography aided in outlining the range of perceptions in both a particular and general manner. The remaining three papers are studies in progress. In the second paper, Bonzo outlines how he is examining ‘social media, networked learning, learning ecologies’ (SMNLEs) as they are shaped by the connections learning technology professionals (LTPs) forge through social media tools. The goal of his research is to explore the kinds and range of perceptions about the connections within the individuals’ learning ecologies. Bonzo, then, describes his current progress and future steps. Costello takes a phenomenographic approach to case study. Her aim is to explore the effects of the presence of guest lecturers in higher education classes conducted using information communication technologies. In particular, she intends to examine interactions, experiences, and engagement of learners as well as group cohesiveness. Plans for data collection and analysis are outlined. The author of the last paper, Koole, uses phenomenographic methodology to explore identity of doctoral-level learners. Koole describes how she intends to use discourse analysis to strengthen her understanding of interview transcripts as well as using a two-person interview method for observation and member-checking. She describes how these methods are intended

to complement the phenomenographic analysis of the interview transcripts. In addition, she outlines some of the issues she faces in terms of analysis and trustworthiness.

The significant concepts to be covered in the papers include: awareness, variation in experience, structural and referential aspects, categories of description, pool of meaning, and trustworthiness (validity). The discussion will be shaped around the following questions:

- How do you see the relationship between phenomenography and other qualitative research methods?
- What benefits come from using phenomenography for your study?
- What challenges did you face in using phenomenography to investigate an area that relates to networked learning?

References

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