BEGINNING TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCE

Thesis

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KEY WORDS

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence. In Queensland, the context for the research presented here, the competence of beginning teachers is appraised by their supervisor (usually the principal) at the end of their first year of full-time employment. This appraisal is conducted on behalf of the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration and a positive outcome enables beginning teachers to achieve full teacher registration. Although there exists research suggesting that principals bring to the appraisal process their conceptions of competence, there is a dearth of knowledge about beginning teachers' conceptions of their own teaching competence. The research presented here adds to the debate about competence by including the voice of the beginning teacher. This focus, located within the context of local issues, is used to explore important themes that are relevant to other systems of beginning teacher appraisal.

The selection of phenomenography as the research approach adopted for this study is based on its appropriateness to the investigation of a phenomenon such as competence. Phenomenography aims to describe, analyse and understand the ways in which people experience aspects of the world around them. The point of departure that sets apart this approach from many others, is the principle that phenomenography seeks to investigate neither the phenomenon, nor the people who experience the phenomenon, but the relation between the two. The results of a phenomenographic study are presented as a description of all of the possible conceptions that a specific group can have about a particular phenomenon.

For the research presented here, eighteen beginning teachers were interviewed individually in order to identify and describe the variation in their conceptions of competence. Research participants representing State, Catholic and Independent school systems were drawn from preschools, special, primary and secondary schools of one provincial city, in one regional area of South East Queensland.

Two major outcomes emerged from the research presented here. Firstly, beginning teachers were identified as experiencing competence in a number of ways.

Although these conceptions were varied, their number was quite limited. Six distinct conceptions of beginning teacher competence were identified, with a further finding that individual beginning teachers were not limited to one conception, but conceived of competence in multiple ways.

Because the relational nature of competence demands that it be investigated within the context in which it is experienced, this study also identified five different approaches to competence appraisal, as understood by the beginning teachers who had undergone the appraisal process. Comparisons of both conceptions of competence and approaches to appraisal were then compared to existing research in this area.

This thesis presents an alternative view of competence and appraisal that may be used to further develop the process of appraisal and indeed, the professional development of beginning teachers.

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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Helen Huntly Date

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Chapter One
Background to the study

1.1 Introduction

The competence of teachers entering the profession is a significant issue for providers of teacher education and the many education bodies who employ graduate teachers. At various stages of their pre-service and professional careers, teachers are formally judged on aspects of their competence. This appraisal begins when the performance of undergraduate student teachers is evaluated during periods of practice teaching and continues post-graduation, when beginning teachers are appraised to enable their formal entry into the teaching profession. This thesis focuses on the latter, the appraisal of beginning teacher competence, and argues that this is problematic because teacher performance has been traditionally judged against an externally created definition of competence (Poster & Poster, 1991). Beginning teachers themselves, are rarely invited to contribute to the debate surrounding the competent performance of practitioners within their own profession. When it comes to defining teacher competence, the voice of the teaching novice remains unheard (Elbaz, 1991).

The research presented here seeks to add to the understanding of beginning teacher competence through an investigation of the conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers themselves. Although there exist some research findings relating to the conceptions of beginning teacher competence held by school principals, (Thompson, 1998) there is a dearth of research relating specifically to beginning teachers' conceptions of their own competence. The present research is both important and timely as its results will add a perspective that until now, has been largely ignored. Through participation in this study, at the very least, beginning teachers will finally have their voices heard in relation to the phenomenon of their own teaching competence. At best, the knowledge revealed in this project will contribute to the current debate about teaching competence.

1.2 Background to the Study

More than any other time, the competence of teachers, both nationally and internationally, is under public scrutiny. While American schools debate the wisdom of regular, compulsory teacher appraisal, teachers in the UK are forced to deal with the effects of mandatory appraisal of competence (Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 1994). Similarly, Australian education bodies are involved in the complex process of developing a nationally recognised set of professional standards for teachers (Board of Teacher Registration, 2002). There is little doubt that universal agreement of the composition of such standards is virtually impossible.

At the local level, the competence of Queensland teachers has been recently brought into question by the State Government. Education Queensland's 'Career Change' program sought applications from self-confessed incompetent teachers, to participate in a number of $50,000 retraining initiatives, thus placing the professional capabilities of our teaching workforce under the microscope. Of even more significance is an observation that at no stage is the Government willing to identify 'incompetent' teachers, nor do they provide a 'competent teaching' criteria, against which teachers may judge or be judged. A reliable and recognised set of performance indicators continues to elude members of the teaching profession.

Although relatively rare for most experienced practitioners, close scrutiny of performance is not a new phenomenon for early career teachers in Australia. Specifically in Queensland, the context for the research proposed here, beginning teachers are required to serve a twelve month period of provisional registration, prior to their formal acceptance into the teaching profession. This process is overseen by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration and is a prerequisite for all beginning teachers. Parallel with this provisional registration requirement, there exists a similar process of probation that is specific and unique to the teacher's particular employing body. It is the former, the appraisal of beginning teachers

conducted by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, that is of interest here. This compulsory appraisal represents formal judgement of teacher competence through a process that relies on an externally constructed definition of teacher competence.

In Queensland schools, responsibility for the appraisal of beginning teachers rests with the principal, whose duty it is to formally report on aspects of teaching competence (Invarson, 1989). This important task requires beginning teachers to be judged against a set of criteria contained in a checklist and interpreted by the supervising principal. The present study argues that if a fair judgement is to be made, consideration must also be given to the conceptions of teaching competence held by beginning teachers themselves. The appraisal of beginning teachers must not be based solely on an externally created view of competence without consideration of the conceptions of competence held by the very group of teachers who are most affected by the outcomes of such appraisal. For this reason, the research presented here seeks to complement the existing research on teacher competence by providing the perspective of beginning teachers.

The aims of this study are twofold. The first interest is in the identification of the conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers and secondly, the variations between and within these conceptions are sought. Accordingly, the following questions guide the research and at the same time provide structure to the thesis:

1. What are the different conceptions that beginning teachers hold in relation to beginning teacher competence?
2. What variations exist between and among these conceptions?
3. How do these conceptions compare to those held by the principals who appraise beginning teacher competence?

The research presented here represents an innovative approach to the study of competence. Much of the existing research has offered definitions of competence as it applies to education policy or academic advancement. Through a focus on

competence as experienced by a specific group, this study offers an additional perspective. The point of departure of the research presented here, is its attempt to understand the phenomenon of competence through an investigation of how beginning teachers make meaning of their own teaching competence.

To enable a full understanding of the nature of this research, a number of themes need to be explored. The following section represents such an exploration through investigation of the relevant themes in the literature about beginning teacher competence.

1.3 Themes in the literature

A review of the research already undertaken about beginning teachers reveals a substantial number of studies dealing with a broad range of issues. Although there does not exist a depth of research relating specifically to the conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers, there is available, a number of associated topics that 'set the scene' and help to define the parameters of the research presented here. This section will present a review of the literature relevant to this research, through a discussion of the elements of beginning teacher research that inform the current research.

1.3.1 Beginning teachers

Although the first year of teaching is often viewed as an extension of preservice experience, beginning teachers are identified as having significantly different contextual needs from both student teachers and experienced practitioners. Recognising the unique characteristics and needs of these different groups of teachers, several researchers have identified teaching as a profession whose members pass through a series of developmental stages. The following discussion explains the concept of 'beginning teaching' through the identification of a number of professional development or teaching 'stage' models. It is through such understanding that an appreciation can be gained of the unique characteristics of the participants in the research presented here.

Early studies by Fuller and Bown (1975) lead to the development of a three-phase model of teacher development. This model suggests that teaching is a profession that may be characterised by the passage of its members through a series of sequential stages. The initial *pre-teaching* stage is represented by teachers who identify more readily with pupils than with teachers. This stage symbolises an experience where

student teachers draw heavily on their own experiences of being taught in a formal setting. Further development of beginning teachers sees them enter the *survival* stage where they adopt sole management of their own classroom. As the name suggests, this stage is characterised by a preoccupation with classroom control and mastery of content. It is frequently described in terms of *sink or swim* where naive novice teachers collide headlong with the realities of classroom life in what seems a matter of survival.

The subsequent stage of *teaching performance* is commenced when more experienced teachers begin to shift their focus from problems of *teaching* to problems of *learning*. Having come to terms with and successfully addressed the procedural problems inherent in the classroom, teachers in this stage are better equipped to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of individual students. Berliner (1988) argues that previous models of teacher development do not adequately explain the range of characteristics that differentiate beginning teachers from their more experienced counterparts and proposes a five stage developmental model through which a teacher progresses from novice to expert.

The *novice* stage is characterised by late pre-service and early career teaching. Berliner refers specifically to the initial year of teaching service where beginning teachers adhere to a relatively inflexible series of context-free rules and procedures, usually acquired during practice teaching placements. The next stage of Berliner's model identifies the *advanced beginner* where, in their second or third year of employment, these early career teachers are capable of integrating pre-service theory with classroom practice to provide relevant, contextual learning experiences. After three or four years of experience, the *competent teacher* is able to make conscious choices and exercise judgement over the relative importance of

elements which impact on successful student learning outcomes. Competent teachers set rational goals and realistic means by which these may be achieved, although their teaching may not yet be characterised by fluidity or flexibility.

The next stage identified is that of *proficient teacher* where, after five or more years of experience, some teachers are able to predict classroom events due to the development of a certain level of intuition. This stage is characterised by an emerging ability of the teacher to recognise patterns from classroom experience, although still relying on an analytical and deliberative process in deciding on an appropriate course of action. The final stage of *expert teacher* is identified by the ability of teachers to perform effortlessly and with fluidity. They operate intuitively, which enables them to select the appropriate pedagogical and managerial actions that allow them to demonstrate well-learned critical, analytical and reflective educational processes.

Research of contemporary education issues includes a broad range of studies that seeks knowledge of the various stages through which newly employed teachers will progress (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Berliner, 1988; Kagan, 1992; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch & Enz, 2000). Although there exists some variation in the timing of these stages, most researchers agree that beginning teachers may be identified as those who are operating within their first year of full-time employment (Berliner, 1988; Kagan, 1992; Kuzmic, 1994). In response to the suggestions of these and other researchers, the research presented here will delimit the collection of data from those teachers who have just completed or are about to complete their first year of teaching. This definition of time sits nicely with the formal judgement of beginning teachers' competence at the conclusion of their first year of full time service. This compulsory teacher appraisal is required of all beginning Queensland teachers by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration.

As with all forms of professional judgement, the appraisal of beginning teachers seeks evidence of *competence*, and it is this phenomenon of competence that forms the basis of the discussion in the following section.

1.3.2 Competence

The phenomenon of competence is not a recently contested issue, nor one that is unique to the teaching profession. Early twentieth century factory owners sought to improve productivity through the results of investigative studies of worker competence (Sandberg, 1991). This research however, employed a narrow, scientific definition of competence, reducing it to rules, formulas and laws. Observable tasks were delimited in terms of the knowledge, skills and attributes required for efficient performance of set tasks (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 1996).
Dunlop (1992) reports that this process-product notion of competent performance introduced to education through the industry and training sector, formed the basis of many teacher appraisal programs throughout the Western world. Such programs sought to define desirable teacher attributes, against which teachers were judged. It was assumed that competent teaching facilitated positive student outcomes that, in turn, resulted in an efficient, productive future workforce.

Sandberg (1994) reports that the development of competence remains a very important issue in today's society. Because competent performance is so closely linked with workplace success, there is a recognised demand for efficient processes within education and training. Sandberg also notes that *competence* is a concept only recently introduced by those responsible for training and development within human resource management. For this group, competence refers to the necessary stock of human knowledge and skills for achieving competitive advantage, with its appraisal requiring the deconstruction of work performance in the form of job analysis. However, Sandberg (1994) recognises that human competence at work is not primarily constituted by a list of attributes that is possessed by the worker and externally related to the work, as stipulated by the dominant rationalistic approaches within human resource management.

The research presented here argues that the narrow, factory-oriented view of competence has little to contribute to the complex processes involved in education. These traditional views in reality, merely offer a description of *performance*, not *competent performance*. Messick (1984, p. 227) differentiates the two, as follows:

> Competence refers to what a person knows and can do under ideal circumstances, whereas performance refers to what is actually done under existing circumstances. Competence embraces the structure of knowledge and abilities, whereas performance subsumes as well, the processes of accessing and utilising those structures and a host of affective, motivational, attentional and stylistic factors that influence the ultimate responses.

Recently, the education sector has followed the lead of other contemporary industries in demanding a reliable method of measuring work standards and worker competence. Norris (1991) contends that the concept of competence has thus become associated with a drive towards greater practicality in education, placing a more significant emphasis on the assessment of performance, rather than knowledge. He argues further, that a comprehensive understanding of the contested nature of competence is not possible without an appreciation of the 'troubled history' surrounding the concept. Despite its apparent simplicity, over time researchers have used a series of constructs to define the notion of competence. Norris (1991) describes a number of approaches to the phenomenon of competence in terms of a behaviourist or generic approach.

Within the *behaviourist* approach, the most prevalent approach to human competence rests on a description of behaviour and the situation in which the behaviour is to take place. In this approach, competence comprises a description of action, behaviour or outcome in a form that is capable of demonstration, observation and assessment. Usually, behavioural objectives are defined, as an expression of what is to be learned or achieved. This use of performance criteria indicates the outcome/product orientation of the behaviourist approach.

The *generic* approach involves empirical investigation to establish competencies that are used to differentiate between average and expert performances. It favours the "elicitation through behavioural event or critical incident interviewing of those general abilities associated with expert performers" (Norris, 1991, p. 333). In this manner, effective performers are identified before a study is conducted to differentiate between their performance and that of an individual who is

acknowledged as being less competent. The final step is to identify the specific skills, abilities and characteristics responsible for this difference.

Boreham (1999) recognises a third, rather traditional approach to competence that assumes a representational theory of the mind in which the contents of the mind reflect objects and events in the world outside. This *cognitive* view of competent performance involves the judgment of human competence against technically generated solutions to posed problems. Such an approach attempts to model the physiological structure of the central nervous system in order to train the neural systems to produce desirable outputs from identified inputs.

Despite capturing some aspects of intellectual work, information–processing models of cognition have proved inadequate. Although such models might successfully explain performance in narrow, static tasks, they do not provide an appropriate understanding of the competence required in work contexts characterised by flexible teams, altering roles and responsibilities, new technology and the constant need to learn new skills. Norris (1991) argues that none of these approaches has the capacity to accurately measure competent human performance.

Furthermore, Sandberg (1994) maintains that traditional approaches to competence have been oriented solely towards either the worker or the work. He suggests that the dominant worker-oriented approaches emphasise attributes possessed by workers, thus identifying those skills, knowledge, abilities and personal traits that are required for effective work performance. In the identification of these elements, groups of *experts* came to a consensus, before rating workers on an agreed-upon scale. Within the work-oriented approach however, the focus shifts from the individual worker to the actual work undertaken. Work activities are identified before an attempt is made to devise the particular attributes required to competently perform the associated work. The disadvantage of this approach lies in the difficult transformation of work descriptions into desirable attributes.

Although there exist several approaches to competence and its measurement, none is able to fully explain the many facets of competent human performance. Hager and Beckett (1995) argue that the problem lies in the traditional notion that

competence may be identified from an investigation of either the worker or the work. They argue that competence is not one-dimensional, but *relational*. As such, competence is a relation between individual abilities and the satisfactory completion of appropriate tasks. Hager and Beckett (1995, p. 213) claim that to "ignore the essential relational character of competence" results in an inability to capture the "holistic richness of the world."

Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1996) agree that it is not possible to meaningfully separate practitioners from their activities, nor from the situations in which they practise because practice, rather than being fixed or static, is a "dynamic flow produced and reproduced by practitioners" (p. 414). Decontextualising the competence of the worker is therefore problematic. Taylor (1967) originally proposed this notion when he advised industry managers that in order to more successfully define competence and thus ensure a competent workforce, the close relationship between the worker and the work must be acknowledged. Neither, he suggested, could be developed in isolation of the other.

Sandberg (1994) reinforces the limitations of ignoring the relational nature of the worker and the associated work and suggests that such ignorance often produces fragmentary descriptions whereby categories for describing a particular competence are often chosen in an ad hoc manner. He argues further that predefinition of competencies (as knowledge, skills or attitudes) does not allow the capture of a worker's competence in accomplishing the work, nor does it recognise the internal relationship between workers' attributes and work activities.

Such rationalistic approaches assume that the world and the person are externally related to each other, giving rise to an indirect description of human competence at work. However, Sandberg (1994) recognises that the worker can *never* be separated from his/her work, and as a consequence, a description of work activity can never be made independently from the worker involved. Aspects of human competence may never be reduced to a list of attributes externally related to work.

Sandberg (1994) recommends an approach to human competence that seeks to achieve a more comprehensive view of performance. This *interpretive* approach to

human action is based on the belief that the world is not merely the world, but the world as experienced by someone. The person and the world are internally related through human experience of the surroundings where workers conceive their work as they actively seek contextual understanding. Sandberg (1994, p. 38) justifies his belief through a suggestion that " in order to provide more accurate descriptions of human action in organizations, we should investigate the internal logic of human activity. That is, the individuals' ways of making sense of their work situations".

Departing from traditional methods of competence appraisal, this contemporary view recommends an audience of the voices of the individuals under investigation. Bennett (1992) agrees that a thorough understanding of human competence cannot be gleaned through mere observation of worker performance. *Legitimate voices* must be heard if the research of competence is to come as close as possible to workers' own experiences of their work. Sandberg (1994) believes that competence will be more fully understood if workers' own experiences are made available. Thus, the point of departure of this approach is the use of data regarding workers' ways of conceiving their world. Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1996) even go so far as to suggest that the ways in which the work is experienced, constitutes the foundation of human competence. For this reason, the research presented here aims to describe beginning teachers' conceptions of their own competence.

Although the primary focus of this study is an examination of the ways in which beginning teachers conceive the phenomenon of teacher competence, it is difficult to conduct the research without some investigation of teacher appraisal. It is the appraisal process after all, that seeks evidence and judgement of competence.

1.3.4 Teacher appraisal

In the United Kingdom, the Education Act of 1986 encouraged the introduction of teacher appraisal schemes within local education authorities (Marsh, 1996). Bennett (1992) reports that the consequent appraisal pilot schemes were influenced by two conflicting models – a control model and a staff development model. It was soon agreed amongst teachers that the staff development model produced more

positive and professionally motivating results than the control model, which had its emphasis in parent-power, governor-power and national intervention. When the Education Regulations for School Teacher Appraisal were passed by Parliament in 1991, appraisal became mandatory for all British teachers. Bennett (1992) argues that the British model did little to define and enhance teacher competence. Its focus on an externally defined conception of competence, instead served to ignore the views and needs of the nation's teaching fraternity. As a consequence, the appraisal of teacher competence has deteriorated into yet another form of bureaucratic control.

In the 1980's a similar pattern emerged in the USA, where, as a result of a National Commission on Excellence in Teaching, there was a rapid move towards teacher appraisal (Hartley, 1992). A range of appraisal models continues to operate across each state in America, yet few seem capable of capturing, let alone measuring the elusive phenomenon of teacher competence. In keeping with its penchant for testing, it is not surprising that American schemes have largely depended upon assessment instruments to measure teacher performance (Marsh, 1996). Some teachers undergo standardised tests, whilst others are judged against a checklist of observable behaviours. In some states, teacher competence is measured solely, in terms of student learning outcomes.

In Australia, the appraisal of teacher competence is evolving slowly, but is still embryonic in terms of national agreement. During the 1980's and 1990's there existed a priority of reforming education to fulfil economic needs (Marsh, 1996). Since this time, several interest groups have recommended a range of strategies to enable the standardisation, equity and accuracy, lacking in existing models of teacher appraisal. National unions promoted award restructuring for competent practitioners, termed *Advanced Skills Teachers*, whilst other education bodies focused upon the identification of desirable teaching competencies (Marsh, 1996). McRae (1994) reports that current Australian teacher appraisal schemes have their focus in a number of areas. These include the assessment of newly appointed teachers after a probationary period, appraisal of school principals as part of fixed-term contracts in some states, and numerous school-initiated appraisal schemes.

Throughout the history of education, teacher competence has come under investigation, largely as a means by which to formally judge teaching performance. In the past decade however, a number of initiatives has been developed in an attempt to move the phenomenon of teacher competence beyond the realm of formal performance appraisal. Education Queensland, the governing body of state education in Queensland has recently released a discussion paper on the development of professional standards for teachers (Education Queensland, 1999). This study contends that professional teaching competence should be identified and defined for reasons other than those of appraisal. The Board of Teacher Registration, (2002) argues that professional standards are a prerequisite for any system of education where practitioners need to be recognised as possessing the necessary attributes, skills and knowledge required of members of the profession. It maintains that although recognised professional standards should be able to be judged by assessed performance, the priority of such standards must be the focussed performance of teachers.

As in most parts of the Western world, the Australian education system has failed to identify and implement an appropriate and reliable system for measuring teacher performance. The study presented here contends that this failure has been sustained because a comprehensive understanding of competence continues to elude those who seek to identify and judge the performance of teachers. This is certainly not an ideal situation facing those teachers who must undergo compulsory appraisal. The research presented here seeks to add to the understanding of beginning teacher competence with the following section identifying the focus and context of the study.

1.4 Focus and context of the study

McRae (1994) argues that in Australia, beginning teachers are one of the few groups of teachers who must participate in compulsory performance appraisal. In Queensland, the context of the present study, newly appointed teachers serve a twelve-month provisional registration period before undergoing a formal appraisal process conducted by their supervisor – usually the school principal (see Appendix 1). If and when the principal is satisfied that the beginning teacher is competent to

carry out the duties required of the profession, he/she signs the official documentation enabling full registration status to be achieved. Having served the provisional registration period and successfully participated in formal appraisal, the newly appointed teacher is considered to be *competent*. This is a disturbing notion in the light of previous discussion that reports the distinct absence of any widely accepted definition or description of teacher competence. If competence is such an elusive phenomenon then it follows that accurate judgement of competence is equally problematic.

This is a notion recognised by Thompson (1998) in his PhD study. Thompson suggests that in the absence of any formal tools for measuring teacher competence, principals revert to a series of *conceptions of competence* that are personally and professionally conceived. His research utilizes a phenomenographic study of the ways in which principals conceive of competence. This knowledge is especially valuable in light of the notion that, when appraising beginning teachers, principals are influenced by their personal conceptions of what constitutes competent performance.

Thompson's study identifies and discusses seven conceptions of competence held by the twenty-seven principals who were interviewed. He argues that these beliefs regarding competent teaching practice influence principals in their appraisal of beginning teachers. The present study seeks to build upon the knowledge gleaned from Thompson's research, through an investigation of the conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers. It will be argued that if principals' conceptions of competence have a bearing on the appraisal process, then so too should the conceptions of competence held by those being appraised.

The present research focuses on a group of Queensland beginning teachers who have been teaching for one year. These beginning teachers hold positions in a regional education district in South East Queensland. The research group comprises 14 females and four males representing preschools, primary, secondary and special schools with the Queensland State Education (Education Queensland), Catholic Education and Independent Schools' systems.

This research seeks to capture and describe the ways in which beginning teachers conceive the phenomenon of teacher competence. The findings of this research will give voice to a previously ignored section of the education community. Therefore, the aim of the study is to describe beginning teachers conceptions of their own professional competence. Having introduced the focus and context of this study, the following section of this chapter will explain its origin and significance

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of this research lies in its potential to give voice to a previously unheard section of the education community. Although much research has been conducted in relation to the experiences of beginning teachers (Bullough & Knowles, 1991; Kagan, 1992; Knowles, 1992; Berman, 1994; Marsh, 1996; Turner-Bisset, 2001), few, if any studies have specifically sought knowledge of beginning teachers' conceptions of competence. Previous research of beginning teachers has focused on aspects such as developmental stage models, initial teaching concerns and internship processes. In a departure from these common themes however, Thompson's (1998) research focused on the conceptions of competence held by principals. Although this produced important knowledge relating to principals, there remains little knowledge about how beginning teachers actually conceive of the phenomenon of teaching competence. In fact, it was the recommendation of Thompson that his research be replicated among additional groups involved in the appraisal of competence. The research presented here takes up Thompson's challenge by providing the perspective of beginning teachers.

In Queensland, the context of the present study, it is the duty of the principal to appraise or judge the competence of beginning teachers to enable their full teaching registration. Thompson (1998) reports that the principals involved in his research conceived of competence in a number of ways and used these conceptions as points of reference in the appraisal of the beginning teachers under their supervision. This compulsory appraisal process is an important and often daunting event in the professional lives of beginning teachers and this study contends that the voices of this group of teachers must no longer be ignored.

As a consequence, the study presented here will provide another important dimension of competence that will be of significant interest to the education community, especially those entrusted with the task of judging teacher competence. The results of this research will build on those reported by Thompson (1998) through a broadened perspective of the possible conceptions of competence held by those involved in the process of education. If this study is to describe a set of beginning teacher conceptions of competence, it must employ a research methodology that seeks specifically to uncover conceptions of a given phenomenon. For this reason, the research presented here will take the form of a phenomenographic investigation of the conceptions of competence held by a group of beginning teachers. The following section will outline the relevance of phenomenography, before discussing the methodological processes involved in this study.

1.6 Methodology

Sandberg (1991) argues that traditional approaches to the study of competence have utilized a *first order perspective* where those not directly involved in the work have decided on the skills, knowledge or attitudes necessary to competently perform a given task. Accordingly, this approach yields only an approximate and indirect description of what human competence comprises. Alternatively, Sandberg (1991) recommends the use of a *second order perspective*, characterised by the collection of data from a number of individuals whose competence is under investigation. He recommends the study of the worker's *lifeworld*, constituting the immediate and inseparable relation between the subject (the worker) and the object (the work). Such a study aims to uncover the intentional dimension of human competence through an investigation of the individual's conception of his/her work.

Like Sandberg, Kroksmark (1995) questions the credibility of studies of teacher competence that utilise a scientific foundation. He acknowledges that, although teaching does have a technical, scientific dimension, comprising *knowledge of* certain elements, its competent performance also requires *knowledge about* a broad range of related elements. Kroksmark (1995, p. 371) uses the term *didaktik* to

describe the pedagogy required of the teacher and summarises this and other components that interrelate to constitute teachers' work.

Kroksmark (1995) argues that in order to adequately appraise teacher competence across such a broad range of performance areas, what is required is a concrete and everyday related theory for scientific treatment of the multifaceted activities of *didaktik*. He recommends phenomenography as the research tool of choice because it "assumes a life-world, a co-constituted reality where human being and world are inseparably attached to each other so that understanding and meaning cannot be traced to either one individually." (p. 372). Kroksmark (1995) believes that phenomenography represents a superior method for the study of such a relational phenomenon as teaching. After all, phenomenography claims, not a truth of the contents of knowledge, but instead, claims to formulate different qualitative concepts of knowledge about the same thing.

1.6.1 Phenomenography

Teachers develop a specific teaching competence through a process of professional experience. Traditional research of teacher effectiveness tended to study only isolated dimensions of the performance of the teacher, with methods usually focusing on something other than the thoughts and ideas about the content of the teaching itself (Kroksmark, 1995). Phenomenography can assist those interested in education, to be conscious of the complexity of the phenomenon of teaching. As the object of a phenomenographic study, it is the teachers' *conceptions* of their teaching that take centre stage and it is only when these conceptions are "embedded in the teacher's real world that they become logical and comprehensible" (Andersson & Lawenius, 1983, p. 8).

Sandberg (1991) reinforces the appropriateness of the study of conceptions as they perform an important function in the illumination of concepts of competence in the workplace. He suggests that no study of competence is complete without the inclusion of the workers' own dynamic conceptions of their work. This is a view shared by Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1993). These researchers maintain that skills, knowledge and attitudes (the traditional objects of competency research) are a

precondition for competent performance, but do not represent competence itself. Furthermore, they argue that the difficulty in generalising competence lies in the notion that work is conceived of differently by practising professionals and the workers' conception of the work underpins their capacity to carry it out effectively and efficiently" (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 1993, p.3). The manner in which work is conceived, therefore, provides a framework for the development of subsequent skills and knowledge related to the work.

Other exponents of phenomenography are Jones and Moore (1995) who reveal the inadequacy of traditional research methodologies when applied to a social practice such as teaching. In particular, they seek a more relational model for the study of the phenomenon of competence. According to these researchers, because competence is tacit, informally acquired, culturally embedded and contextually located in practice, it requires a research specialisation that acknowledges that its whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Because the centrality of context is implicit to the definition, acquisition and reality of competence, Jones and Moore (1995) recommend that a phenomenographic study alone, has the potential to gather and interpret data expressed through contextually defined social practice.

One of the characteristics of phenomenography that makes it an ideal method to research the way in which different individuals conceive of the same phenomenon, is its unique ability to identify variation. Velde (1997) suggests that narrow, scientific approaches to the study of competence do not uncover the full spectrum of teachers' work. What is required, she argues, is a fuller understanding of teacher competence that is suited to times of change and uncertainty and which is able to recognise and report variations in the conceptions of competence of teaching professionals. What must be sourced then, is an interpretive-relational approach to the development of competence that includes elements of the workplace environment such as the individual, the context, workplace relationships and different variations of competent performance.

Larsson (1986) believes that these outcomes may best be achieved through the use of phenomenographic investigation that seeks described variation in research participants' conceptions of a specified phenomenon. Analysis of this data

produces an *outcome space* comprising the variation in conceptions of the phenomenon under investigation. Proponents of phenomenography argue that this outcome space represents all possible ways that individuals may conceive of a phenomenon.

Larsson (1986) argues that this form of research has the potential to improve the quality of teaching performance in contemporary society. He suggests that when described variations are reflected upon by teachers, their thoughts about their work may be broadened through an awareness of new conceptions. This awareness may result in a more holistic understanding of their profession and how it is viewed and judged by wider society. Likewise, Sandberg (1994) recognises the need to capture variation in conceptions of competence, if a more comprehensive appreciation of competent performance is to be achieved. He agrees that phenomenography represents an interpretive approach that provides a potential solution to the limitations of current interpretive approaches to the study of competence.

Any decisions that relate to the collection of data within a phenomenographic study must consider carefully the universal purpose of phenomenography, which is to investigate "the qualitatively different ways in which people experience or think about various phenomena" (Marton, 1986, p.31). Also considered, must be the actual purpose of the proposed research. The researcher should identify the broad objectives of the study and the phenomenon to be investigated, whilst recognising that her meaning of this phenomenon may vary significantly from the meaning adopted by the research participant (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). As the proposed study seeks to identify the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which beginning teachers conceptualise competence, the first decision relating to the data collection must seek an answer to the question, from whom will the data be collected?

1.6.2 Sample for this study

Marton and Booth (1997, p. 125) contend that the research group should comprise a "smallish number of people chosen from a particular population". Similarly, Merriam (1988) does not specify the actual size of the group, but argues that the

number of research participants selected should enable the maximum possibility of identifying variation in participant understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. He refers to this research group size as a *purposive sample.* Ashworth and Lucas (2000) contend that participant selection should avoid presuppositions regarding either the nature of the phenomenon or the nature of the conceptions held by particular 'types' of individuals. The researcher must, however, attempt to procure the conceptions of individuals who represent a variety of experience of the phenomenon.

Marton (1988) and Franz (1994) recommend a research group of between 15 and 30 participants to best achieve the aims of phenomenographic enquiry. Consequently, in planning the research presented here, it was decided to investigate the conceptions of a group of 18 Bachelor of Education graduates at the end of their first year of full time teaching. These graduates represent a cross section of beginning teachers thus maximising the range of perspectives encountered. The research group will also replicate the proportions of males and females involved in the teaching profession. Although now working in a regional area of Queensland, it is envisaged that the research participants will have graduated from a variety of teacher preparation programs and will represent a number of education contexts including preschools, primary schools, secondary schools and special schools, within systems managed by Catholic Education, the Independent sector and Education Queensland. Because these teachers represent a range of teaching contexts, they are presumed to possess the variety of experience that is so valued in phenomenographic research.

1.6.3 Data collection: the phenomenographic interview

It has already been established that a phenomenographic study seeks human conceptions of a specific aspect of the world. Marton (1986) argues that these conceptions may be revealed in several ways including drawing, products of peoples' work and the manner in which people behave under controlled conditions. Both Marton (1986) and Svensson (1994) however, believe that conceptions are most accessible through peoples' language. Based on this assumption, the proposed study will utilise a one-to-one interview as the principle means of data

collection. Bruce (1994) recommends the individual participant format over the focus group format because it enhances the focus of the interviewee and enables the researcher to probe further details whilst allowing for constant clarification of meaning and intention on the part of the interviewee.

Other exponents of the interview are Ramsden and Dodds (1989) who believe that this method of data collection is the very effective in an educational setting. They maintain that the interview context enables the researcher to fully explain the purpose of the research and to ask open-ended questions that seek rich, descriptive responses. The interview has the added advantage of allowing the researcher to continually check for understanding. Once this shared reference has been established, it may then be negotiated throughout the interview. This enables the maintenance of a common focus between the researcher and the research participant, by engaging participants in a process of reflection on the specified phenomenon (Ekeblad & Bond, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Gonzalez, 2001).

It has been established that "individuals' conceptions of a phenomena have traditionally been revealed by interviewing individual respondents" (Russell & Massey, 1994, p. 334). Bruce (1996) expands this concept and recommends specifically, the phenomenographic interview as the method most likely to elicit data that is meaningful within phenomenography. She argues "phenomenographic interviews are distinctive from other qualitative research interviews in that their specific purpose is to seek variation in people's experience or understanding of the phenomenon in question (Bruce, 1996, p. 98). Within a phenomenographic interview, attention should not focus on the person nor the phenomenon, but rather the relation between the two. This relationship constitutes how the phenomenon is experienced by the person and it is a description of this experience that is sought in the interview.

Kvale (1983, p. 174) agrees that as a specialised form of qualitative interview, the phenomenographic interview is the most useful in gathering "descriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomenon". He concedes that phenomenography sometimes uses written discourse, but that the interview is more appropriate as it gives the

interviewee greater freedom of expression. It is also more interactive, allowing the interviewer to continually check the meaning attributed to the words used by the research participant. Finally, he argues that more descriptive data may be gathered verbally, as people tend to be more comfortable speaking than they do writing. This belief is reinforced by Bruce (1994) who argues that the most appropriate means of obtaining human conceptions should be identified as one that allows maximum freedom for research participants to describe their experience.

As with each stage of the phenomenographic research process, the stage of data collection must reflect and inform the phenomenographic aim of discovering a set of different ways in which groups of individuals understand a specific aspect of their world (Pramling, 1995; Kvale, 1996). Phenomenography is based on the assumption that because all humans have different experiences, a phenomenon will appear differently to each individual. The purpose of the phenomenographic interview then, is to ask questions which will open up the thoughts and reflections of interviewees, enabling them to express their conceptions. According to Francis (1996, p. 38) the primary aim of the interview is "to have the interviewee thematise the phenomenon of interest and make the thinking explicit". Phenomenographers believe that there are a finite number of conceptions that may be experienced in relation to a specific phenomenon (Marton, 1981; Marton & Pang, 1999). The aim of the phenomenographic interview then, is to tease out these conceptions for subsequent categorisation.

After data collection is complete, the next phase of the research process involves a careful analysis of the data. The following section outlines such analysis within a phenomenographic study.

1.6.4 Analysis of the data

As with all other phases of the phenomenographic research process, the analysis of data should be driven by the main aim of the study (Renstrom, Andersson & Marton, 1990). Bruce (1996, p. 103) suggests that "data analysed in a phenomenographic study continues the process of exploring the subject-object relations begun when data gathering". Accordingly, the analysis process should

uncover various concepts to be represented in the form of categories of description. Bruce (1996) maintains further that analysis will terminate with the presentation of two specific outcomes. The researcher will present not only the outcome space representing the phenomenon under investigation, but also descriptions of the various concepts discovered within that outcome space. To facilitate the successful generation of these outcomes, the entire analysis procedure must be guided by the research aim of uncovering variations in human conception of phenomenon. In the research proposed here, the main task will be the identification of the different ways in which beginning teachers experience and understand teaching competence.

Johansson (1996) maintains that analysis should begin with the central assumption that there exists, a limited number of qualitatively different ways in which a given aspect of reality may be conceptualised. He argues further that the uncovered understandings must not be seen as categories used to classify the subject, but moreover as categories that represent the various ways in which a phenomenon may be conceptualised. Ultimately then, the basic unit of analysis is not the subject, but the conception.

As previously outlined, data analysis must begin with a clear picture of the object of the research and this picture must remain focussed throughout the entire process. Furthermore, it is vital that the researcher continue to dwell on the experience of the participant. Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p.22) reinforce this point with a warning that although generalisations across individuals are of value, “it is important that the individual’s unique experience is not lost”.

As in the phenomengraphic studies reported by Larsson (1986), Sandberg (1994) and Velde (1997), the proposed study will collect the necessary data through a process of individual phenomenographic interviews. After recording a number of interviews with beginning teachers, the tapes will be transcribed for analysis. These transcripts will form a ‘pool’ of data and using an iterative process of reading and rereading the ‘pool’, commonalities and differences will be highlighted.

As the present research seeks knowledge of beginning teachers' conceptions of competence, attention will be drawn to interview responses with a shared focus. Having identified a number of possible conceptions, data analysis will begin with the iterative process of reading and rereading the data allowing the researcher to highlight commonalities and differences in the verbal responses of interviewees. Quotations representing these recognised commonalities will then be used to describe conceptions among participating beginning teachers. Further phenomenographic analysis will identify the variations between those conceptions constituting the *outcome space* of conceptions of competence held by the beginning teachers involved in this study. Phenomenography argues that the conceptions identified in such a study, are representative of those of the target research group. The conceptions highlighted by this study may then be compared to those reported by Thompson (1998).

1.6.5 Judgement of phenomenographic outcomes

It is generally accepted that the conventional criteria for judging the rigour of quantitative research are not appropriate within the domain of qualitative research because qualitative investigation represents a methodological proposal that does not believe in the existence of an objective reality. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.2) believe that within the qualitative paradigm, reality is "conceived in terms of the meanings it has for us, which are constructed and reconstructed as a result of our changing experiences and other social practices".

Because the very essence of qualitative research rejects the positivist notion that reality is an absolute condition, separate from human existence, it follows that the judgement of a qualitative study should not be made in the traditional quantitative manner. Kvale (1995) contends that qualitative investigations are unable to be judged in terms of the *scientific holy trinity* of validity, reliability and generalisation. He argues further that accepted forms of research validation must change when the domain of social science moves from the prediction of fact to the interpretation of meaning, as is the case in the research proposed here. Within qualitative investigation of the social sciences, validity represents the quality of the

craftsmanship involved in the research. Kvale (1995) believes that such craftsmanship involves the continual checking and theoretical interpretation of research findings. Such quality control should not take place at the conclusion of the study, but throughout each phase of the project. Within the research presented here, this important form of quality control will be undertaken at each phase, including the interview process, where clarification of meaning will be continually sought from the research participants.

Just as the judgement of validity is inappropriate for qualitative research, the scientific notion of reliability is not as relevant within the social sciences. Sandberg (1994) prefers the judgement of *faithfulness* rather than reliability, when judging the outcomes of any qualitative research project. Specifically within phenomenography, whose aim is to identify and describe individual conceptions of some aspect of an individual's reality, the more faithful the researcher can be to the identification of individual conceptions of reality, the better able we are to understand human action within a specific social setting.

In mainstream science, the most common form of reliability is replicability of research outcomes, where two or more independent researchers achieve results, similar to the original researcher. In the case of phenomenography however, Saljo (1988) argues that it is not reasonable to require replicability of the original researcher's discovery as this serves to overlook the researcher's intentional relation to the individual's conceptions of reality. Saljo (p.161) argues that to remain as *faithful* as possible to the investigated conceptions, the researcher must "demonstrate how he/she has controlled and checked his/her interpretations throughout the research process". This faithfulness should be upheld when formulating the research questions, selecting the participants, obtaining the data, analysing the data and reporting the results. The reliability of qualitative research exists in the researcher's interpretation, yet quantitative researchers would see this as having a negative impact on research outcomes. To maintain faithfulness in the qualitative research process, the researcher must therefore maintain an *interpretative awareness* that allows her to acknowledge and explicitly deal with her subjectivity throughout the research. During each phase of the project, the

researcher must be aware of the manner in which her interpretations influence the research process.

Due to its interpretive nature, the outcomes of a phenomenographic study are unable to be judged in the manner employed by research methodologies within the quantitative paradigm. Because of the need for researcher interpretation of participants' conceptions, phenomenographers must take care to be as faithful as possible to the participants' own experience. After all, phenomenography "seeks to comprehend phenomenon, not on the basis of the researcher's perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the situations studied" (Maxwell, 1992, p.289). For this to occur all reported research must be grounded in the language of the people studied, it must rely on individuals' own words and conceptions and it must have as its priority, the accuracy of the perspective of the participant.

Having discussed the manner in which the present research may remain as faithful as possible to the intentions of the participants, attention will now focus on the expected outcomes of the proposed research.

1.7 Outcomes of the study

The outcomes of this study will provide a number of conceptions of teacher competence held by beginning teachers. This data is especially important because at present, the beginning teacher appraisal process is influenced by the manner in which principals conceive of the phenomenon of competence. If the voices of principals are to be considered, then surely beginning teachers' conceptions of their own competence must also be heard. The research presented here seeks to redress this current imbalance, through an investigation that gives voice to the previously unheard voices of beginning teachers. This study will therefore analyse critically, examine and interpret the conceptions of teaching competence held by beginning teachers. It is possible that the results reported in this study may influence the manner in which beginning teachers are appraised, prior to their formal entry into the teaching profession. At the very least, it will be interesting to discover how, if at all, beginning teachers' conceptions of competence compare to

those of principals. At best, the results of this study, having deepened understanding of the phenomenon of teaching competence, will facilitate the development of a more equitable and accurate appraisal process.

This research also has the potential to contribute to the ongoing development of a set of professional standards by which teachers may operate and be judged. It is indeed timely, as previous discussion highlighted the current work being undertaken by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration and Education Queensland in relation to the recognition and publication of a series of generic professional standards for the teaching profession. It is envisaged that the outcomes of this research project will provide a previously ignored perspective of what constitutes teaching competence.

Having presented discussion of the outcomes of this research, the following section will provide a statement of the delimitations and limitations of the study.

1.8 Delimitations and limitations of the thesis

The major delimitation of the study presented here is inherent in the design of the investigation and the collection of data. Svensson (1994) argues that the delimitation of the phenomenon under investigation is crucial for the overall research project. He contends that "phenomena always exist in a context and they may be delimited in different ways in relation to this context" (p.5). The design of this study is characterised by beginning teachers and their relationship to the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence. As such, the interest here focuses on beginning teacher competence from the perspective of the beginning teacher. This study varies from that conducted by Thompson (1998) in that his research sought to identify such competence through the eyes of principals.

The limitations of this research are identifiable largely in relation to the context of the study. The conceptions of competence to be reported are those of a specific group of beginning teachers drawn from a particular education system in the western world. Should the study be undertaken in another state or country, a more comprehensive set of categories depicting beginning teachers' conception of

competence, may be forthcoming. This study will intentionally limit its interest to data originating only from teachers who have been employed on a full-time basis for one year. The final section of this chapter will outline the contents of each of the six chapters planned for the presentation of this research study.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

This chapter has introduced the general aims of the present study. Following this, was a discussion locating the focus and context of the study. Further sections reported the methodology used in data collection and analysis, and the potential significance of the outcomes of this research. A more extensive examination of the literature relevant to the beginning teacher competence and appraisal will be presented in Chapter Two. The third chapter will present a detailed discussion of the methodology chosen for this research project. A phenomenographic investigation is considered the most appropriate method through which beginning teachers' conceptions of competence may be identified and categorised. Chapter Four will describe the range of conceptions of competence constituting the outcome space of this study and the approaches to appraisal as experienced by beginning teachers. Chapter Five will explore the relationship among the conceptions of competence, drawing on research previously discussed in Chapter Two. Recommendations for further research will be presented in the final chapter, along with a summation of the research.

Chapter Two

Themes in the Literature on Beginning Teacher Competence

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the literature relating to the concepts of beginning teacher competence and the process that principals use to appraise the competence of novice teachers. The chapter will begin with an examination of the place of *beginning teachers* in the continuum of teacher development, through discussion of a series of developmental *stage* theories. Attention will then shift to the international notion of teacher appraisal and how this process relates to beginning teachers in the local context of the present study. Several models of teacher appraisal will be examined in an attempt to define specifically, of what it is that the appraisal process seeks evidence. The notion of *competence* will then be investigated.

A number of traditional views of worker competence will be reported with particular reference to the competence of beginning teachers. The chapter will continue with an extensive critique that highlights the deficiencies in the traditional, product-process view of competence, before presenting an alternative view of competence that more effectively reflects the unique characteristics of the work of teachers. In light of previous discussion, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the literature review.

2.2 Beginning Teachers

The purpose of this study is to investigate the conceptions of teaching competence of beginning teachers. Accordingly, a review of relevant literature must begin with an examination of the notion of 'beginning teachers' and where this particular group of practitioners is situated along the continuum of teacher development. In order to investigate the lifeworld of that group of practitioners who may be categorised as beginning teachers, it is necessary to gain complete understanding

of their work context and developmental level. After all, several well-accepted theories argue that teacher competence develops and is refined throughout a series of stages (Fuller & Bown, 1975, Berliner, 1988; Steefy, Wolfe, Pasch & Enz, 2000). Each of these *stage models* refers to an early period of teaching performance which represents beginning teacher status. The following discussion will therefore describe that group of teaching professionals who, for the purposes of this study, will be identified as 'beginning teachers'. It will briefly outline a selection of the major theories of teacher development and how these theories describe the lifeworld of the teaching 'novice'. This information will be vital in gaining an accurate understanding of this particular period of the professional life of the teacher.

2.2.1 From student to teacher

The simplest way to define *beginning teachers* is through comparison with their more experienced colleagues. This notion forms the basis of a multitude of research that situates teachers on a continuum from pre-service, through novice to longer-term senior teachers. Much of this research has led to the description of a number of *stages,* through which teachers must pass on their way to achieving a senior or more experienced status. It is through examination of these stage theories that a comprehensive picture of the beginning teacher begins to emerge. For this reason, discussion in the sections that follow will focus on locating beginning teaching as a specific and identifiable stage, through which all teachers pass. Several well-documented stage theories will be examined in a search for some common understandings about what it means to be a *beginning teacher.*

Formal entry into the 'teachers world' is often referred to as a rite of passage for beginning teachers (Knowles, 1992). After university graduation and commencement of paid employment novice teachers experience a ritual that allows them entry into a culturally shaped and culturally legitimated world (Elbaz, 1991). Berman (1994, p. 55) suggests that:

> The process of becoming a teacher is an experience analogous to the process of becoming an accepted member of a culture, whereby

standards and behaviours are passed on from some members of the teaching fraternity to neophyte teachers.

Knowles (1992) argues that this transition from student teacher to teacher is seldom smooth, as beginning teachers struggle to adjust to their newly acquired professional status. There is little doubt that entry into the teacher's world is swift and often devoid of guidance or induction. In fact, the teaching profession is characterised by its expectation that the novice will assume immediate classroom autonomy (Berman, 1994). The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (1981) also recognises that such a transition, although being new and challenging, will ultimately create a series of changes in behaviour, personality adjustments and new awareness levels.

Although the first year of teaching is often viewed as an extension of preservice experience, beginning teachers are identified as having significantly different contextual needs from both student teachers and experienced practitioners. Recognising the unique characteristics and needs of these different groups of teachers, several researchers have identified teaching as a profession whose members pass through a series of developmental stages. The following section of this chapter will explain the concept of 'beginning teaching' through the identification of a number of professional development or teaching 'stage' models. It is through such understanding that an appreciation can be gained with regard the unique characteristics of the participants in the present study. This knowledge will contribute to the creation and development of an authentic picture of the lifeworld of beginning teachers by guiding the researcher's analysis of the collected data on beginning teacher competence.

2.2.2 Stages of teacher development

In the latter half of the twentieth century, much research on teacher development was based on the concept that teachers' knowledge and behaviour evolved through a series of recognised stages. Griffin (1986) argued that, over time, teachers tend to become technicians in response to the expectations of such education stakeholders as students, other teachers, principals, parents and the broader

community. These changes in cognitive and classroom functioning have been formally grouped by several researchers into progressive, hierarchical patterns or 'stages'. Indeed, these stage theories attempt to explain the series of observable changes that are experienced by teachers as they develop and perfect their pedagogical craft.

Fuller (1969) developed a three-phase professional development model based on the major concerns held by teachers at various stages of their careers. His initial stage relates to *pre-service non-concerns* where student teachers, apart from short periods of practice teaching, are not subjected to continual life in a classroom where they have sole responsibility. Fuller suggests that even the most practical pre-service education program will not adequately prepare teachers for the realities of classroom life.

Upon graduation and entry into their own classroom, beginning teachers will experience a phase of *early teaching concerns* which focus, not on the students, but on themselves. Fuller suggests that this stage is characterised by self doubt and insecurity where teachers are preoccupied with concerns relating to sufficient levels of planning and maintenance of order. These beginning teachers seek student approval and require significant levels of professional and emotional support.

Fuller's final stage relates to *late teaching concerns* and as such, describes the life of the teacher after successful negotiation of the earlier stages. During this final phase, teachers are described as possessing a clearer sense of direction and purpose, where their concerns shift from their own needs to the needs of their students. Accordingly, teachers now focus their attention on the planning and management strategies required to achieve individual student outcomes.

In offering this stage theory, Fuller argues that different teachers will experience these phases at invariant times and for varying periods. He does suggest, however, that the self doubt and insecurity experienced by teachers early in their careers can be minimised through formal programs such as internship and induction. Processes such as these are able to 'smooth the waters' of initial classroom

immersion due to their inherent characteristics of educational and emotional support in a positive nurturing environment. These programs assist beginning teachers through their focus on professional development and by catering to the individual needs of the teachers involved. The benefits of supportive practices such as these will be taken up in a later section of this study.

Building on his earlier studies, in 1975, Fuller paired with Bown to publish a revised three-phase model of teacher development. This model suggests that teaching is a profession which may be characterised by the passage of its members through a series of sequential stages. The *pre-teaching* stage is represented by teachers who identify more readily with pupils than with teachers. This stage symbolises an experience where student teachers draw heavily on their own experiences of being taught in a formal setting. Further development of beginning teachers sees them enter the *survival* stage where they adopt sole management of their own classroom. As the name suggests, this stage is characterised by a preoccupation with classroom control and mastery of content. It is frequently described in terms of 'sink or swim' where naive novice teachers collide headlong with the realities of classroom life in what seems a matter of survival.

The subsequent stage of *teaching performance* is commenced when more experienced teachers begin to shift their focus from problems of *teaching* to problems of *learning*. Having come to terms with and successfully addressed the procedural problems inherent in the classroom, teachers in this stage are better equipped to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of individual students. Suggesting that previous models of teacher development did not adequately explain the range of characteristics that differentiated beginning teachers from their more experienced counterparts, Berliner (1988) proposed a five stage developmental model through which a teacher progresses from novice to expert.

The *novice* stage is characterised by the initial period of teaching service where student teachers and beginning teachers adhere to a relatively inflexible series of context-free rules and procedures, usually acquired during practice teaching placements. The next stage of Berliner's model identifies the *advanced beginner* where, in their second or third year of employment, these early career teachers are

capable of integrating pre-service theory with classroom practice to provide relevant, contextual learning experiences. After three or four years of experience, the *competent teacher* is able to make conscious choices and exercise judgement over the relative importance of elements which 'impact' on successful student learning outcomes, Competent teachers set rational goals and realistic means by which these may be achieved, although their teaching may not yet be characterised by fluidity or flexibility.

The next stage identified is that of *proficient teacher* where, after five or more years of experience, some teachers are able to predict classroom events due to the development of a certain level of intuition. This stage is defined by an emerging ability of the teacher to recognise patterns from classroom experience, although still relying on an analytical and deliberative process in deciding on an appropriate course of action. The final stage of *expert teacher* is characterised by the ability of teachers to perform effortlessly and with fluidity. They operate intuitively, which enables them to select the appropriate pedagogical and managerial actions that allow them to demonstrate well-learned critical, analytical and reflective educational processes.

More recently, researchers such as Steffy, Wolf, Pasch and Enz (2000) present a six-phase model of teacher career growth, yet still include pre-service and beginning teachers in the initial phase termed *novice teacher*. In this model, the process of reflection and renewal forms the basis of the development of the teacher through a series of stages. It is the belief of these researchers that as teachers develop professionally, so too does their capacity to engage in purposeful construction of meaning and knowledge for themselves in a process that "relates thought and action" and "connects present knowledge and skills to a vision for a desired future" (p. 10).

It is interesting to note that researchers such as Berliner (1988) consider a teacher 'competent' after three or four years of teaching service. The concept of competence forms the basis of the present study and as such, will be explored in greater detail in a further section of this chapter. What will follow now is a discussion of how the various stage theories characterise the notion of 'beginning

teachers' and where this group of practitioners is located along the continuum of professional development.

2.2.3 Locating beginning teachers

As the focus of the present study, teachers in the early phase of their professional development are of particular interest and subsequently require formal identification. Research on teacher professional development confirms that there is no universally accepted timeframe guidelines, yet several authors define beginning teachers as those who have not yet reached the end of their second year of full time teaching (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Berliner, 1988). Although complete agreement has not been achieved as to the relative amounts of time spent in each stage of the previously discussed developmental models, most researchers share similar views in relation to what characterises beginning teachers.

A review of the research on beginning teachers reveals several identifiable characteristics that are shared by this particular group of practitioners. During the early period of their teaching experience, beginning teachers have a preoccupation with establishing control over the learning environment. Indeed, in the initial months of full time employment, novice teachers consider that effective disciplinary strategies take priority. Behaviour management then, is at the forefront of their classroom operation (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1989; Kagan, 1992; Lee, 1994). Beginning teachers also spend significant amounts of time in the acquisition of knowledge about their pupils. Gathering details of students' differing abilities, learning styles, personalities and educational needs is prioritised by novice teachers as they begin the process of instructional design (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1989; Gilroy, 1989; Kagan, 1992). They often experience a feeling of self-doubt, questioning their ability to 'deliver the goods' (Gilroy, 1989; Nias, 1990). Kagan (1992) even goes so far as to suggest that beginning teachers require an initial period of teaching service so that they might validate themselves in this role.

What is evident through an investigation of the common elements of early professional experience, is a notion that beginning teaching is characterised by a

series of concerns or dilemmas. Nias (1990, p. 78) reinforces this view and argues that the teachers involved in her studies "appeared to move through career phases which were dominated and determined by personal concerns." According to Nias, beginning teachers' early attempts at successful classroom management are hampered by concerns relating to poor communication between teachers and school administrators, inadequate supervision of their initial pedagogical and managerial efforts, lack of direction from their supervisors and high levels of stress and subsequent fatigue.

Nias (1990) argues further that these beginning teacher concerns and self-doubt contribute to an inability to be self-aware. It is her belief that at the heart of teaching is the ability to make sense of the education context and to be aware of 'self as teacher'. In the early stages of their careers, beginning teachers are unlikely to possess the reflective skills that enable them to deliberate on their practice. Reflection, at this stage tends to be superficial and has its focus on the practical, procedural elements involved with the smooth management of the classroom. With time and experience, these teachers will further develop the skills that enable them to combine a focus on the classroom with alternative priorities such as student learning outcomes and community involvement (Nias, 1990; Bullough & Knowles, 1991). Much research in this area also highlights the notion that beginning teachers are unable to be aware of themselves as teachers until they are aware of themselves as people (Nias, 1990; Kagan, 1992).

In his studies of beginning teachers, Lee (1994) identifies several concerns, the most common of which relates to the teacher's ability to successfully manage the classroom in terms of student behaviour. Inadequate and untried 'control' strategies create significant levels of tension in this initial period of employment. Bullough, Knowles and Crow (1989) concur that beginning teachers experience many concerns defined in instrumental terms emphasising skill, content and knowledge deficiencies. These researchers believe that such concerns include a perceived lack of knowledge and skills in the areas of classroom management, motivation of students, catering for individual student difference and appropriate assessment of student work.

Similarly, the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (1981) acknowledges that in the transition period between university graduation and fully fledged membership of the teaching profession, novice teachers share concerns relating to the selection of appropriate teaching strategies, recognition of student learning problems, implementation of an effective behaviour management plan and adoption of relevant and useful planning techniques.

The results of these and other studies of beginning teachers assume that, at least in its early phases, teaching is "an occupation which requires the ability to live with and handle constructively, a multitude of dilemmas, tensions, contradictions and paradoxes" (Nias, 1990, p. 197). Research on beginning teachers tends to occur at a time when the novice teacher is already being closely monitored. In Queensland, the context for the present study, beginning teachers are considered provisionally registered until after their first year of full time employment. At the end of this period, teaching competence is formally appraised in order to gauge teachers' suitability for full registration. Because such appraisal necessitates a judgement of the beginning teacher's competence, it warrants further investigation by the current study. Accordingly, the following section of this chapter will present a review of the competence appraisal process in this, and other national and international contexts.

2.3 Teacher appraisal

According to Bollington, Hopkins and West (1990) appraisal involves the formation of qualitative judgements requiring an analysis of past performance, with the aim of planning for the future. Relating such judgements to the general workplace, Poster and Poster (1991, p. 1) define appraisal as:

> a means of promoting, through the use of certain techniques and procedures, the organisation's ability to accomplish its mission of maintaining or improving what it provides while at the same time seeking to maintain or enhance staff satisfaction and development.

Within the profession of education, teacher appraisal has frequently been utilised as a means of judging the quality of the performance of its members. In fact, Bartlett (2000) goes so far as to argue that teacher appraisal should form a pivotal role in any effective system of performance management. Because there is considerable disagreement whether teachers' work should be monitored, the following section will examine the reasons why teacher appraisal has, and continues to remain an educational priority.

2.3.1 Rationale for teacher appraisal

The process of appraisal is not one that is unique to the teaching profession. On the contrary, the areas of commerce and industry have long applied performance review strategies to their workers and work practices. Handy (1972) suggests that such systems of appraisal are undertaken so that the individuals involved may be considered for financial reward, promotion or performance enhancement. Such judgements may be sought for formative reasons, whereby staff are provided with feedback on their levels of performance, or for summative reasons where individual performance is compared with some external criteria.

When applied to teaching, McRae (1994) contends that the nature of appraisal reflects its purpose. He argues further that these judgements are made either for governmental control over teachers work, the establishment and maintenance of professional standards, as an opportunity for the career progression of teachers or to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching.

An examination of the purposes of appraisal specifically within the Australian education context, reveals similar motivations. Beare (1994) believes that there exist several reasons why teachers may be formally appraised. In the search for *professional improvement,* teachers are examined so that they might be provided with constructive feedback relating to their professional performance. If they wish to be considered for *promotion,* practitioners are judged on their worthiness to advance to a further professional level. Where individual teachers are not targeted, but whole school performance is appraised, the evaluation is conducted for *improvement of student outcomes. Evaluation for accountability* is driven by an

economic or political imperative whereby performance indicators are sought for the purpose of audit. The final reason given by Beare (1994) for the conduct of teacher appraisal is for *research purposes* where forms of, predominantly Action Research, are conducted in an attempt to refine professional practice through the provision of new insights into the process of learning.

Despite the importance of each of these reasons for teacher appraisal, the current study seeks primarily, to locate the judgement of beginning teacher competence within the 'big picture' of teacher performance appraisal. To this end, the purpose of the following discussion is to identify when and why beginning teacher competence is appraised.

Marsh (1996) believes that teacher appraisal, regardless of its motivation, should facilitate the availability of more detailed and objective information to teachers, yet there is no one superior approach to teacher appraisal. To the contrary, there exist several models that seek information on teacher performance. Through his research on the appraisal process, Scriven (1994) has identified five methods by which teachers may be judged. *Research-based* teacher evaluation seeks details of classroom performance that is judged against criteria obtained from empirical studies of teacher effectiveness whereas *competency-based* teacher evaluation judges teachers in relation to a predetermined set of teaching competencies that are derived from theories of learning and teaching.

The *reflective teaching* or *decision-making* model attempts to measure the quality of the thought processes of the teacher to make appropriate classroom decisions, whilst *peer evaluation* provides opportunities for teaching colleagues to measure teacher effectiveness against a limited number of criteria. Such judgement can only be made on the basis of one's own experience. Finally, *evaluation by the principal* describes the long-dominant use of experienced principal's judgement based mainly on classroom visits, using whatever criteria their experience suggests are appropriate.

Scriven (1994) reveals that such impressionistic classroom observation is simply a variation on the 'clinical supervision' model, but has long endured due to:

- its cost efficiency;
- the speed by which it may be conducted;
- its ability to identify 'hopeless teachers'; and
- the very belief by principals that they have the capacity to accurately judge teacher performance (p. 85).

He does maintain, however, that this popular form of appraisal is neither accurate, nor consistent when throughout their careers, teachers are likely to serve under many 'evaluators'.

A further section of this study will examine Scriven's (1994) final appraisal approach, whereby it is the duty of the principal to evaluate the competence of beginning teachers. The following section, however, will explore several models of teacher appraisal to provide a more complete understanding of the way in which teacher appraisal may be conducted.

2.3.2 Teacher appraisal models

Montgomery (1999) suggests that there exists a number of implementation models that may be utilised in the teacher appraisal process. The *Target Output* model refers to a strategy whereby the teacher agrees to a series of objectives, to which they are then compared, whereas the *Performance Criteria* model seeks knowledge of the teacher's skills and competencies through the search for appropriate indicators. The *Diagnostic* model relies on observations of the teacher within the context of the classroom. These observations are usually undertaken by a senior teacher or principal who then offers advice to the teachers involved.

The *Bureaucratic* model involves detailed attention to teachers' paperwork, by their supervisors. In this model, information is collected through the examination of teaching products and procedures. Within the *Process* model the priority is teaching process over teaching product. In this instance, school superiors accept that they have a responsibility to their staff and therefore use the appraisal process as a learning strategy for beginning teachers. The *Tell and Sell* model provides a highly humanistic approach to appraisal, whereby beginning teachers are regularly

provided with verbal feedback regarding their teaching performance and how it may be improved. In a similar manner, the *Tell and Listen* model involves an interview with the teacher where she is provided with a verbal evaluative report, to which she is then able to respond. Finally, the *Problem Solving* system is a negotiated appraisal approach where, over time, the teacher is provided with multiple opportunities to discuss problems, issues of performance and how these may be resolved. In this manner both the appraiser and the appriasee have a "shared view of the way forward" (Montgomery, 1999, p.2).

Models such as these highlight the many ways that teacher appraisal can be conducted. The choice of model will be influenced by the reason for the appraisal, the context in which it will be conducted and the person implementing the process. Appraisal of teacher performance is not a recent practice. In fact, formal teacher appraisal has its roots in the managerial principles of the late nineteenth century factory, where time and motion studies sought data on the efficiency of worker performance (Hartley 1992). It was subsequently assumed that this process could be generalised to examine the competence of classroom teachers. Further sections of this chapter will take up discussion of the inherent difficulties in such an assumption, but for now, attention will focus on how the teacher appraisal process has evolved on a national and international level.

2.3. 3 International perspectives of appraisal: England

Since the nineteenth century, teacher appraisal has been a common practice in British education. At this time, evaluation of teachers was regarded as an instrument for limiting class mobility (Smyth, 1988). Government representatives demanded 'good' rather than 'clever' teachers who would play their part in raising a critical mass of workers for the industrial society at the time. Teachers were relied upon to act as agents of social control and social cohesion and were judged on their ability to exercise management skills, maintain student discipline and achieve classroom order (Smyth, 1988). These skills were viewed as essential by a government that mandated education to deliver the docile, subservient workers required by an industrial society. There is little doubt that teacher appraisal in

industrial Britain was based solely on the teacher's ability to fulfil the employment doctrine of the State.

The teacher appraisal process continued to be a component of the education system in England into the twentieth century. In the mid 1970's, however, this process was limited to formal inspection of teachers within their workplace. These classroom observations were seen as the most effective manner by which to evaluate the work of teachers.

By the 1980's, the process of teacher appraisal had been adopted by the majority of British schools (Forde, 1989) and during the ensuring decade, Margaret Thatcher placed formal teacher appraisal at the forefront of her Conservatives' education policy. During the 1980's a shift in government policy facilitated a change in the way British teachers were appraised. Until this time, newly qualified teachers (beginning teachers) were evaluated by the Local Education Authority and the school. In the late 1980's however, the head teacher of the school was given sole responsibility for the appraisal of newly qualified teachers. If these teachers were not considered to be professionally competent within their first two years of employment, they could be dismissed (McMahon, 1994).

Lewis and Varley (2000) report that at the commencement of the 1990's, continuation into a second year of teaching was dependent upon the beginning teacher's sustained competence to meet the standards for the newly defined Qualified Teacher status. After a negotiable period of induction, beginning teachers were recommended for this award by their principal. Should they fail to meet these standards, teachers were not eligible for admission to the General Teaching Council and consequently were unable to teach in the State sector (Lewis & Varley, 2000).

Poster and Poster (1991) report that with the demise of the formal probationary period, all British teachers were expected to undergo a compulsory biennial cycle of performance appraisal. To this end, school principals were responsible for the selection of appraisers whose duty it became to meet with, observe and interview

classroom teachers. In subsequent 'follow up' meetings discussion focused on identification of the developmental needs of the teacher and how these could best be achieved.

With changing governments, teacher appraisal experienced a long period of limited focus, but in 1986, legislation was introduced making appraisal a legal requirement for all teachers. Some commentators at the time suggested that this represented a political move to exert more control over the work of teachers (Bartlett, 2000). By 1997, the British Office for Standards in Education had identified the weakness of this teacher appraisal system. This organization revealed that the system lacked rigour, set unrealistic targets for its practitioners, ignored the infrequency and ineffectiveness of proactive classroom observation and contributed little to the quality of teaching. (Montgomery, 1999).

Bartlett (2000) argues that a revised appraisal process, used in conjunction with other existing indicators, may soon provide a means of exerting greater control over teaching, by assessing performance and linking it to salary. Furthermore, a recent report on teacher appraisal in England has recommended that Newly Qualified Teachers should not be judged by the same standards as their more experienced counterparts. They should, however:

- participate in a statutory induction year;
- be in receipt of a reduced teaching load;
- receive individual training and support;
- undertake a series of formal reviews prior to the recommendation of the principal, of their suitability to achieve Qualified Teacher Status (Montgomery, 1999).

Research on the teacher appraisal process has continually recommended that effective teaching is at the heart of the appraisal process, yet limited attempts have been made to define the exact meaning of *effective* or *good* teaching (Johnson, 1994). The next section of this chapter will focus on the background of teacher appraisal in the United States of America.

2.3.4 International perspectives of appraisal: USA

As in England, the American process of teacher appraisal had its roots in nineteenth century government domination, where teacher evaluation was undertaken in an attempt to legitimate the control of education by the State (Smyth, 1988). The notion of scientific management, prevalent at the time, initiated a preoccupation with order, control and social efficiency where effective teachers were judged on student outcomes.

Hartley (1992) reports that during the mid twentieth century, there existed problem-based teacher evaluation schemes where teacher competence was identified and stated in behavioural terms. This proved problematic as it was recognised that classroom performance could not be reduced to a series of itemised performance indicators and categories that had been generated elsewhere. In supporting this concept, Hartley (1992, p. 46) argues that:

> the notion of competence cannot logically incorporate any analysis of what it is to be educated in a society. Quality and effectiveness must be seen in relation to the wider needs of education.

Despite these concerns, the early 1990's saw the development of a series of principles of teacher appraisal by the United States' government. These guidelines, however, proved quite counterproductive and created tension amongst teachers and their controlling organizations (Hartley, 1992). More recently there has been a move to local management of schools, but the Secretary of State still insists on approving regional plans for teacher appraisal.

From 1995, state education councils in the United States, have continued the search for an equitable and manageable process of teacher appraisal, especially targeting beginning teachers. The Kentucky Council on New Teacher Standards for Preparation and Certification has published a list of standards, expressed in behavioural terms, which aim to formulate the professional level, against which beginning teachers are to be judged (Marsh, 1996). However, as in England, questions have been raised as to the reliability of a 'checklist' that purports to

appraise such a subjective and personal phenomenon as teacher competence (Lokan & McKenzie, 1989).

Invarson (1989) argues that in America, there is broad agreement that the form of teacher appraisal conducted in most school districts is meaningless and ineffective, functioning neither as a tool for improving the quality of teaching, nor as an instrument of accountability. In supporting this notion, McLaughlin and Pfeifer (1986, p.1) report that even in 'exemplary' school districts, teacher evaluation is characterised by:

- the dominance of the principal as sole, and often reluctant appraiser;
- a focus on individual teachers, to the detriment of a sense of shared evaluation across the school;
- a system that appears to be implemented with little regard to the curriculum or organisational context of the school, conversely, relying on research generated checklists of doubtful validity for teacher evaluation;
- a limited offering of training courses, designed to remedy the teacher deficiencies identified in the appraisal process.

With regards the history of teacher appraisal in these two developed countries, the present study is most interested in the shared experience of the principal as sole appraiser of beginning teachers. In both the UK and America, responsibility for beginning teacher appraisal rests with the supervising principal. It is the contention of this study that principals' conceptions of competence should not constitute the sole 'benchmarks' of competent beginning teacher performance. Alternatively, the conceptions of competence held by the beginning teachers themselves, should be considered. The application of this viewpoint may alleviate some of the universal confusion and mystery surrounding the process of teacher appraisal.

Examination of the process of teacher appraisal in both the UK and America reveals a history of dissatisfaction and professional tension. Neither country is yet to offer an appropriate and widely accepted system that judges the competence of teachers, and specifically those teachers who are newly graduated. With a backdrop of appraisal developments in both the UK and America, the following

section will investigate past and present systems of teacher appraisal in Australia and more specifically in Queensland – the context of the present study.

2.3.5 Appraisal: an Australian perspective

Smyth (1988) reports that teacher evaluation in colonial Australia had its beginnings in a struggle between the Church and the State, over the right to establish and maintain schools. It was during the nineteenth century that the church and clergy instigated a formal educational process, controlling the conditions and functioning of Australia's first teachers. With the subsequent development of centralised government systems of education, control of teachers' work reverted to the State. In a similar manner to that experienced in Industrial England, Australian school inspectors were employed as economic watchdogs, protecting the efficiency of the education process. "Teacher evaluation in Australia at this time is an example of scientific management and bureaucratic control at its best" (Smyth, 1988, p. 10).

William Wilkins, a key government figure in the area of education at the time, sought to maintain this control through the development of standardised methods of instruction, methods of inspection, classification of teachers and classification of pupils (Smyth, 1988). To this end, he produced a Table of Minimum (Pupil) Standards, against which, tested pupils were compared. The results of these comparisons formed the basis, upon which teacher effectiveness was judged. It was not until the 1960's that the inspectorial system was reassessed in the light of current curriculum and pedagogical developments. Goldharmer (1967, p.1) reveals that researchers at the time developed a counter-picture of the taken-for-granted focus of inspectorial classroom observation and criticised these "uncoordinated, one-shot visits by well meaning outsiders". Recognising that it was not conducive to the professional development of teachers, the system was phased out by the 1970's (Proston, 1989).

Since this time, the appraisal process has not been the topic of major debate, nor discussion. Goldharmer (1967) however, recognises that teacher appraisal is an

important issue on the Australian education scene and reports the following circumstances for appraisal:

- teachers seeking promotion;
- teachers seeking advancement to a higher performance band (advanced skills teacher);
- beginning teachers seeking confirmation of their employment;
- identification and remediation of recognised failures in teacher performance (p. 3).

The most common of these circumstances, and the one which is considered in the present study, is the particular form of appraisal experienced by beginning teachers, prior to their recognition and acceptance into the mainstream teaching profession – the rite of passage discussed earlier. Although recognising that Australian states and territories were yet to standardise the system used to appraise beginning teachers, Marsh (1996) reported the 1992/93 release of a draft, Competency Framework for Beginning Teachers. As a national project, this report identified a series of performances and attributes considered essential for novice teachers. These National Competency Standards were devised as a basis for the judgement of teacher effectiveness in the following areas:

- using and developing professional knowledge and values;
- communicating, interacting and working with students and others;
- planning and managing the teaching and learning process;
- monitoring and assessing student progress and learning outcomes;
- reflecting, evaluation and planning for continuous improvement (p.397).

Despite the publication of these standards, Chadbourne and Chadbourne (1994) express their dissatisfaction with the seemingly ad hoc nature of teacher appraisal in Australia and the lack of standards that provide adequate guidance for making judgements of *quality*. They condemn the use of competency based standards, instead promoting a form of judgement derived from the knowledge base of teaching which more adequately captures the complexity, sophistication and subtlety of teaching. In fact, they argue that:

> Standards alone are of little use without a clear indication of how they will be applied to the assessment of practice in a fair and valid manner (Chadbourne & Chadbourne, 1994, p. 28).

Adding to these concerns is documented evidence of the current deprofessionalisation of teachers' work that is especially risky in an era characterised by public accountability measured against external standards for teachers (Apple, 2001; Smyth, 2001). In supporting this view, Louden (1994) reports the difficulty with attempting to reduce teaching to mere skills and attributes, suggesting that such mechanistic checklists invariably underestimate the complexity of the teaching profession. Despite the original reason for teacher appraisal in Australia, Ingvarson (1989) contends that the appraisal process is now conducted for only two groups of teachers – those seeking permanency and those seeking promotion. Marsh (1996) adds to this discussion with the disclosure that even with these very limited reasons for conducting appraisal, Australian states differ markedly in their official approach to the process.

In Queensland, the context for the present study, beginning teachers commence their fulltime employment with a twelve month period of provisional registration. Towards the end of their first year, they will undergo an appraisal process conducted by their professional supervisor, usually the school principal (Lokan & McKenzie, 1989). Successful involvement in this process will enable their immediate adoption of permanent status, thus completing their probation. Lokan and McKenzie (1989, p. 4) agree that this beginning teacher appraisal is vital and that:

> Appropriate appraisal schemes have the potential to improve the professionalism of teaching, the efficient management of schools, the quality of education provided for students and to satisfy legitimate demands for accountability.

They do however, have concerns regarding the appraisal formats in current use and warn administrators and eduction policy makers that Australia should carefully

rethink appraisal formats, learning from the problems experienced in countries such as England and America.

Marsh (1996) supports this view and suggests that although teacher appraisal has significant potential, its current formats do not allow for a fair, effective and accurate assessment of the work of teachers. He argues that the process of appraisal is a "slippery" (p. 398) one, where teachers (especially beginning teachers) often harbour feelings of suspicion and concern regarding this important judgment of their professional worth. Marsh further recommends that the appraisal process itself, requires a thorough appraisal of its potential to deliver a fair, accurate and consistent evaluation of the work of the teacher.

McRae (1994) suggests that the Australian education community has recently experienced renewed interest in the process of appraisal occurring at the completion of the probationary period for beginning teachers. The research presented here aims to contribute to the emerging issues regarding the *how* and *why* of teacher appraisal, but before this can be accomplished, some attempt must be made to specify what it is about teachers that the appraisal process seeks to examine and evaluate. The following section will discuss several key issues relating to the aspects of teachers' work that are considered worthy of appraisal.

2.3.5 What is appraised?

Dempster (2000, p. iv) reports that, although most schools agree on the elements considered in the appraisal process:

> there are also *home grown* features which reflect each school's context, culture and structure. This being the case, it must be assumed that a major difficulty in planning for appraisal, is the identification of what the process seeks to examine and how reliable evidence may be gathered.

Lewis and Varley (2000) warn that without the establishment of an agreed criteria for measuring success, the monitoring of beginning teacher performance tends to

be impressionistic and anecdotal. According to Marsh (1996, p. 405-406), one or more of the following aspects is likely to be examined as part of the process of appraisal:

- behaviour of the teacher – this strategy involves detailed observations of what the teacher does within the classroom and in other educational contexts;

- teacher contribution to educational teams – this again involves observation of the relationships formed by teachers working in cooperative teams and how observed procedures enhance or limit the actions of the teacher;

- behaviours and experiences of students – this necessitates an examination of the engagement, interactions and relationships developed and maintained within the learning context;

- student outcomes – this information is gathered through a variety of formal and informal processes which seek details of *what* and *how much* students have learned as a direct result of their interactions with the teacher.

Similarly, according to Wragg, Wileley, Wragg and Haynes (1996) the criteria for effectiveness of teaching include the behaviour and experience of students, the behaviour of the teacher and the outcomes of the teaching. It is clear that the appraisal of beginning teachers seeks information relating to teaching behaviour and performance. What is not clear, however, is an identification of the specific elements of *behaviour* and *performance* which are to be judged. Chadbourne and Chadbourne (1994) suggest that this lack of specificity creates a 'weak link' in the chain of events that constitute teacher appraisal.

The present study seeks to strengthen this link through an investigation of what it is about their teaching practice that allows beginning teachers to consider themselves *competent*. Past research has examined the conceptions of beginning teacher competence as experienced by school principals (Thompson, 1998), but the research presented here shifts the focus from the conceptions of the principal to the conceptions of the beginning teachers themselves. Used here, the term competence

refers to the positive aspects of teacher behaviour and performance which contribute to effective classroom operations.

The judgement of teacher competence is a compulsory duty, undertaken by all Queensland school principals (or their representatives). Such judgement has the potential to affect the professional future of the beginning teacher. In addition, it is vital that policy makers closely examine teaching competence so that informed decisions can be made, regarding what it is that will be appraised in the appraisal process. The following section of this chapter will present a discussion of past and present measures of the competent performance of beginning teachers, through a close examination of the notion of competence.

2.4 Beginning teacher competence

The possibility of determining conclusively what it is that makes one teacher more *effective* than another has always been an attractive and elusive challenge to educators (Dunlop, 1992). Teacher effectiveness is difficult to define and :

> despite some research findings which would tend to agree with intuitive beliefs about the characteristics of effective teachers, there is always one nagging obstacle in the path of a clear interpretation of these results. The stumbling block is the difficulty of reaching consensus on what effects, 'effective' teachers should be helping to create (p. 1).

Larsson (1986) supports this notion with a belief that the study of skill in teaching, or teaching effectiveness, remains one of the most prominent fields of research in the education field. According to him, the main reason why definitive answers cannot be discovered is the mistaken belief that teaching skill may be gauged through observable behaviour. Larsson (1986, p. 35) however, reveals that this is a superficial view and that "a description of behaviour that does not explain the meaning of that behaviour is a mystification".

Another exponent of this view is Reynolds (1992) who argues that a conclusive definition of teacher effectiveness is even more difficult to achieve when related

specifically to beginning teachers. She proposes a series of problems that may be encountered when attempting to determine expectancies of beginning teachers for the purpose of teacher licensure. She maintains that historically, research on teacher effectiveness has been the province of the researcher and therefore has been of little use to the teacher. Furthermore, few demonstrated relationships have been discovered between teacher actions and student outcomes, with little knowledge forthcoming to explain the difference between effective beginning teachers and effective experienced teachers. Finally, what is known about teaching, as documented in education literature, may not reflect what competent teaching is envisaged to be.

As there appears little documentation of research specifically relating to beginning teacher competence, the following section will provide an overview of the literature regarding the many ways that 'good' teaching may be identified.

2.4.1 Teacher effectiveness

Examination of the literature concerning teaching competence reveals a multitude of terms used to describe excellent teaching. Research in this area includes that pertaining to:

- good teaching (Brown and McIntyre, 1993);
- effective teaching (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996; Kyriacou, 1997);
- creative teaching (Woods and Jeffrey, 1996);
- quality teaching (Stones, 1992).

Over time, the quality of teachers has come under close scrutiny from several sectors of society. Early attempts to capture the essence of effective teaching tend to be more descriptive than analytical, producing lists of qualities rather than analysis of action (Turner-Bisset, 2001). During the 1970's, the research focus shifted to teaching styles and produced much documentation on which specific pedagogical styles resulted in positive learning outcomes for students (Bennett, 1976). More recent research into effective teaching has tended to generate lists of

different qualities, dispositions, attributes and behaviours considered common to practitioners whose teaching is considered superior (Kyriacou, 1997).

A 1994 study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was based on the view that teaching quality should be regarded as a holistic concept, comprising competencies across five key dimensions:

- knowledge of substantive curriculum areas and content;
- pedagogic skill, including the acquisition of and ability to use a repertoire of teaching strategies;
- reflection and the ability to be self-critical, the hallmark of teacher professionalism;
- empathy and the commitment to the acknowledgement of the dignity of others;
- managerial competence, as teachers assume a range of managerial responsibilities within and beyond the classroom. (OECD, 1994).

One of the most recent studies of effective teaching is the Hay McBer Report (DfEE, 2000) which argues that there are three main groups of factors within the control of the teacher, that influence student progress. These are termed *teaching skills, professional characteristics* and *classroom climate.* Each category consists of hierarchical lists of desirable dispositions, qualities and behaviours. A weakness of this study however, is that its findings do not recognise the importance of all of the various kinds of knowledge that underpin the work of effective and excellent teachers (Turner-Bisset, 2001).

Turner-Bisset (2001) argues that for effective teaching to take place, a wide range of knowledge bases must be employed in the process of teaching. It is her belief that the term *knowledge* means far more that mere knowledge about the 'content' of a learning experience. Knowledge, in its broadest sense refers to all of the details of teaching, over which the teacher must have mastery. Turner-Bisset (2001) asserts that historically, knowledge bases for teaching have been comparatively neglected, in favour of the skills required to achieve learning

outcomes for students. She proposes a contemporary view of effective teaching that comprises a model of the knowledge bases required to facilitate learning.

Turner-Bisset's model of knowledge bases is more comprehensive than that proposed by Schulman (1986a; 1986b) who argues for those categories of knowledge that are evident in the performance of effective teachers. Schulman's (1986b) knowledge categories include:

- content knowledge;
- general pedagogical knowledge;
- curriculum knowledge;
- pedagogical content knowledge;
- knowledge of learners;
- knowledge of educational contexts;
- knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values.

Turner-Bisset (2001) argues that there are two major deficiencies of this model. Firstly, the model provides little more than the 'active' phase of operating in the classroom and secondly, it does not provide any explanation of how the knowledge bases interact. Accordingly, Turner-Bisset proposes a more comprehensive model of knowledge bases for teaching that serves to address the deficiencies of previous models. The major elements of this model are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Curriculum knowledge refers to knowledge of the entire curriculum designed by the employing body. It includes syllabus documentation, programs of study and the kinds of curriculum materials used to teach each subject. *General pedagogical knowledge* is that generic knowledge about teaching that is derived from classroom experience. It relates to those procedural elements of teaching that are learned from practice and include such as aspects as behaviour management, classroom control and management of resources. *Knowledge of models of teaching* can be described as beliefs about teaching and learning such as how children learn and what teachers do to enable them to learn. Teachers' prior experience of the education process has an impact on what teachers do and how they do it. "In the absence of clearly

delineated models and understandings of teaching and learning, beginning teachers tend to fall back on what they know" (Turner-Bisset, 2001, p.15).

Knowledge of learners is presented as a complex mix of elements including empirical knowledge of learners and cognitive knowledge of learners. This knowledge base relates to what the teacher knows about characteristics of children at certain ages, their social nature and interests, and knowledge of theories of child development. From such knowledge comes the ability of the teacher to deliver and adapt learning experiences to suit the specific needs of particular learners. *Knowledge of self* is a knowledge base not often recognised by researchers in this field. It refers to the sense of self as teacher that combines elements of the personal with the professional. It is well documented and accepted that the teaching profession is one that requires a deep investment of self in the conduct of its everyday duties. Nias (1989) agrees that the self is a crucial element in the way teachers themselves understand the nature of their work. "Teaching is a profession in which the self is a crucial element, which demands a heavy investment of the self and in which the self in evaluation and reflection plays an important part" (Turner-Bisset, 2001, p.16).

Knowledge of educational contexts refers to knowledge of all settings where learning takes place. This includes schools, classrooms, early childhood settings and universities, and the broader educational context of the community and society. Because teaching contexts have an impact on teaching performance, it is important that teachers have knowledge of contextual factors such as the socio-economic level of the community, type and size of school, class size, support staff, expectations of the principal and the quality of the relationships within the school. *Knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values* infers that effective teachers, although busy in the classroom dealing with the procedural elements of the profession, should also be explicit in their thinking about the long-term purposes of education.

In this model of effective teaching, each of the knowledge bases is presented as a sub-set of *pedagogical content knowledge* and exists within this particular knowledge base. Turner-Bisset contends that the knowledge bases combine in

different ways to produce different teaching abilities and that in beginning teachers, only some of the knowledge bases are combined (Turner-Bisset, 1997). She argues that "all of these knowledge bases are essential for the most expert teacher, which demonstrates *pedagogical content knowledge* in its most comprehensive form" (Turner-Bisset, 2001, p. 19).

In the absence of any widely agreed-upon terms of reference regarding what constitutes an effective or competent teacher, recent education literature has moved towards the construct of a series of *professional standards* for teachers. The following section will further explore this notion and how it relates to the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence.

2.4.2 Professional standards for teachers

Thompson (1997, p.1) argues that "teaching is not a series of skills and strategies acquired once for all time. It will change as understandings upon which it is based change." It is her belief that current teacher standards in the United Kingdom rely heavily on subject knowledge and "teaching tips" (Thompson, 1997, p.5) and that these are inadequate indicators of competent teaching performance.

Likewise, leading government officials within the Australian education sector report the need for a new means by which to view teaching effectiveness. Specifically the Vocational Education and Training Assessment Services sector of Education Queensland has recently released a scoping paper on the Development of Professional Standards for Teachers (2002). This paper reports that:

> The move to establish professional standards for teachers has gathered momentum in Australia and overseas, including the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom. This has been driven by a diverse range of factors including the demand for greater accountability, the desire to reform teacher education, the need to strengthen teacher professional development and the introduction of teacher performance appraisal. As a result a wide range of employing bodies, professional

> organisations and registration authorities have developed sets of professional standards for teachers (p.5).

Despite several initiatives in Australia, there has been little real progress made on the development of standards at a national level. At a State level however, a number of employing authorities and registration bodies has established comprehensive standards frameworks for teachers, the most recent contribution being formulated by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (2002, p.7). These Professional Graduate Standards include:

- graduates will possess and be able to apply professional and disciplinary knowledge bases;
- graduates will possess and be able to apply a range of literacies relevant to their professional roles;
- graduates will exhibit the skills to create supportive and intellectually challenging learning environments to engage all learners;
- graduates will understand and participate in relationships that charaterise ethical professional practice within and beyond learning communities;
- graduates will be committed to reflective practice and ongoing professional renewal.

These standards are reflected in the reporting documents used by principals to appraise beginning teachers in Queensland (see Appendix 1). As a relatively new initiative, it is yet to be established if the standards represent an accurate and holistic view of beginning teacher competence.

Spalding (1998) goes so far as to suggest that the problem of teacher effectiveness is so complex that no one person has a full picture of teacher competence. In the absence of agreement of the desirable ends of schooling, it is necessary to obtain clarity on the situation through a shift in focus away from the notion of effective teaching, to the identification of teacher behaviours that would be considered highly competent (Dunlop, 1992). The phenomenon of competence will be investigated in further sections of this chapter, but for now, attention will focus on

an examination of how the notion of competent teaching has been handled throughout the recent history of education in the Western world.

2.4.3 Historical perspective of competence

Sandberg (1991, p.1) recognises that "a question of fundamental importance for a modern, industrialised society is why some people are competent in carrying out a task and others are not". He maintains that the historical approach to describing and developing human competence had its basis in the early twentieth century rationalistic tradition of science. In this manner, competence was viewed in an objective way for the purpose of increasing work productivity, thus reducing it to rules, laws and formulas. In his book, "The Competent Manager", Boyatzis (1982) viewed managerial competence in a purely objective way, citing a series of desirable personal and managerial characteristics.

Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1996) argue that these traditional views saw competence in terms of attributes of individuals or tasks to be performed. Observable tasks were delimited in terms of the knowledge, skills and attributes required to effectively conduct the proposed work. Thus, an attempt was made to separate competence from the work to which it referred.

The notion of competence, when used to describe teachers, has always been problematic. Few studies have been able to successfully reduce the role of the effective teacher into agreed upon lists of skills or behaviours. In the early 1950's, the American Educational Research Association formed the Committee on Criteria of Teacher Effectiveness to consider the qualities that characterised *effective* as opposed to *ineffective* teachers (Lokan & McKenzie, 1989). Research centres were also established in several American universities in the 1960's. These contributed to a significant increase in the knowledge of sensible, effective and efficient teaching practice (Dunlop, 1992). From this research, conclusions were made, which attempted to generalise teaching practice across all contexts.

By the 1970's, numerous researchers acknowledged and reported the link between specific teaching behaviours and student learning outcomes. A number of teaching

behaviours were identified which apparently improved the chances of students in the achievement of successful learning. As a consequence, international policy makers in the education domain insisted that teachers displaying these behaviours should be identified and rewarded. This view has increasingly gained favour into the 1990's, particularly in England and Wales where teacher evaluation is mandatory, and in America where testing the competence of teachers is a popular bureaucratic occurrence (Dunlop, 1992).

In the late 1980's in Australia, a number of state and territory reports emphasised the need to critically review spending on schools whilst improving the formal educational standards being attained, attention also shifted to the public scrutiny of teacher competence (Lokan & McKenzie, 1989). The aim of this *process – product* notion of education was to establish relationships between specific teaching behaviours and student outcomes. Dunlop (1992) reports that one of the most common uses of this body of literature on teaching practice has been in the justification of items included on instruments of teacher evaluation.

It was in some way the impact of process – product educational research that initiated the National Workplace Reform Agenda which had its inceptions in 1960's Australia. At this time, behavioural scientists and educational psychologists developed a framework of educational competencies for children. The basis of this model was the belief that educational performance could be assessed through the observation of behaviour. This process – product view of competence was introduced into education through the industry and training sector. In response to an economic push for the provision of employment-related competencies, Australia experienced the introduction of the Australian Standards Framework, a model which viewed competence as a collection of skills (Collins, 1993).

Gerber and Velde (1986) report several employment and training innovations during the early 1990's. Under Prime Minister, Paul Keating, the National Workplace Reform Agenda was launched, promising to make Australian products more competitive through changes in the education and training sectors that sought

to prepare more flexible and skilled workers. Additionally, in a move to introduce generic competencies to the workplace, the National Training Reform Agenda was introduced. By 1992, competency-based training (CBT) schemes were operational in training and employment sites across Australia.

In 1992 the national government's Mayer Committee had facilitated the introduction of a series of workplace *key competencies* described as "generic strands of human capability that are orthogonal to all curriculum areas and subjects and weave through them" (Collins, 1993, p. 6). These skills termed *core skills* by the British and *essential skills* in New Zealand, were designed for the post-compulsory curriculum and included employment related skills such as ability to solve problems and expression of informed ideas and information.

Despite its perceived potential, from the very outset, the competency-based view of effective performance was fundamentally flawed. Collins (1993, p. 4) warns that:

> A major issue for educators is whether, from such a starting point we can invent a way of envisaging and then defining competence, which is of value for more holistic, less material, more human relational, more open-ended human performance capabilities.

He promotes an alternative view of competence which abandons the competencies agenda, recognised as being embedded in an economic vision which seeks to harness educational institutions for the purpose of economic improvement. Velde (1997) also disputes the potential of an education system driven by the economic and social forces within society. She maintains that this narrow view of competence that seeks to measure attributes, not only tends to produce narrow technical skills, but also ignores the individual's meaningful experience of practice. The preceding discussion has identified past attempts to quantify the phenomenon of competence and flagged the limitations of the narrow behavioural approach to this task. The following section of this chapter will further examine the problems encountered with the competency-based approach to educational process and evaluation, before presenting an alternative view of competence.

2.4.4 Limitations of competency-based appraisal

Chappell, Gonczi and Hager (2000) report that the concept of competence continues to be contested in the area of adult education. They maintain that competency-based training and assessment is:

> based on the views that standardised training outcomes can be achieved by all learners if a thorough analysis of the behaviours demonstrated by any competent performer is undertaken and then transposed onto a set of standardised learning sequences (p. 192).

These authors however, realise that this notion assumes a technical, instrumental view of work, ignoring the crucial position of human agency. This narrow view of competence as being readily quantifiable, does not allow for the capture of the complexity of human endeavour. Nor does it recognise the possibility of a variety of paths to the defined outcomes. A further flaw of the competency-based approach is that it objectifies performance in the separation of the subject (person) from the object (performance).

> Performance therefore is alienated from the work experiences of people: first by the use of disintegrating behavioural objectives which atomise and make unrecognisable real work; second, through positioning competence as separate from and independent of the individual worker.
>
> (Chappel, Gonczi & Hager, 2000, p. 193).

Norris (1991) further devalues the use of competency-based approaches to the judgement of performance when he notes that this form of appraisal views knowledge as static – a mere description of information which is deemed important to possess. He believes that this traditional approach to competence involves the following problems:

- competent practice cannot be defined in advance as it is always situationally specific;

- competent action is dependent on the judging audience;
- the competency-based theory finds it almost impossible to truthfully ascertain the nature of situational judgement involved in good practice and the factors which are seen to be given most salience (p. 337).

Barnett (1994) argues that any attempt to define a list of competencies is bound to be partial and debatable, as the list will always be biased towards the view of the author. He questions the ability of practising professionals and professional bodies to accurately identify particular competencies that will transcend both context and time. This is a criticism taken up by Barrow (1995) who emphasises the difficulty in attempting to conceptualise human activity in terms of generic skills or abilities, when such skills are frequently context specific rather than generic. He suggests that commonly quantified skills such as critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, imagination and the ability to display these, is largely dependent on the individual's understanding of a particular context. It should not be expected that measurement of human thought is possible, when to think is to think *about* something. This additional element is surely incapable of measurement.

In a similar manner, Barnett (1994) argues that just as the act of thought may not be separated from the content of thought, neither can competency be stated independently from the learning process. "We cannot pretend that a specification of competencies has no curricular implications: on the contrary, it has inescapable curricular implications" (p. 74). Schon (1987) maintains that the idea that practical competence becomes professional when its instrumental problem solving is grounded in systematic scientific knowledge, is dangerous when transferred to an educational context. He states the danger in assuming that theoretical knowledge can readily be applied to practical situations or problems. The subsequent notion that such competencies can be quantified, must therefore be viewed with some scepticism.

Eraut (1985) reinforces the difficulty of evaluating competence through examination of competencies that have been recognised in one context, yet appraised in another, perhaps quite different context. He claims that:

> Proficiency on routine is essential for competence, but it is the handling of non-routine matters which is responsible for excellence. Not surprisingly, the balance of emphasis during professional qualifications is frequently in dispute (p. 122).

This dichotomy has also been recognised by Walker (1992), who argues that generic competencies, although having meaning in all settings, alone, are not necessarily sufficient for competent performance in any setting. Likewise, Hager and Beckett (1995, p. 10) suggest that:

> it may be argued that the inference of generalisable or generic competencies is unwarranted, because the practices are particular and the probability of transference beyond the particular case, like all inductive argument, only give probability, not stronger warrant of existence.

If an accurate evaluation of competence is to be achieved, as opposed to mere behavioural observation, then a more integrated view of competence is warranted. This reinforces the belief of Barnett (1994) who argues that the use of competency-based standards provides only an impoverished view of human action where individuals are caused to perform against external standards. Such measurement of competence sees humans as mere performers, rather than reflective actors. Similarly, Norris (1991) attacks the traditional view of competence that usually comprises a statement defining performance criteria and expected levels of performance. He believes that this is a flawed notion, as the sum of the parts rarely, if ever, represents the totality of good practice. Norris further attacks the 'performance criteria' view of competence, stating that:

> A more significant feature of models of competence is that in their tidiness and precision, far from preserving the essential features of expertise, they distort and underestimate the very things they are trying to represent (p. 334).

When applied to the appraisal of teacher competence the traditional, scientific view of effective or efficient practice will also tend to create inappropriate or even inaccurate results. In a paper outlining the deficiencies of the competency-based system of teacher appraisal, Burrow (1993) observes that:

> As a profession we have an enormous pool of collective craft or professional knowledge, powerful knowledge, yet for the practitioner it is predominantly experiential and individual. This knowledge must be transcribed into case lore and be subject to constant revision by the profession within a framework of professional values targeted to ensure rich and relevant learning experiences for all children. Any attempt to standardise or promote a technicist definition and/or narrow modes of assessment of teacher competence would fall short of this mark (p. 111).

Several researchers argue that the focus of competency-based appraisal is on task functions, to the exclusion of the worker. Such processes fail to accommodate the fact that no job can be viewed in isolation from the complex set of organisational relationships present within its location (Thompson, 1990; Jones & Moore, 1995; Stewart & Hamlin, 1995). Hyland (1995) criticises specifically this approach within an educational context. He suggests that it is simpler to apply a competency-based model to low level, highly specific occupations, than to highly generalised professional occupations such as teaching. When applied specifically to the appraisal of teachers, Velde (1997) argues that the adopted meaning of competence must have an impact on the attempted measurement of a job where questions of status and value are inextricably bound up with those associated with meaning and application.

Previous discussion cites substantial evidence to question the traditional view of competent performance within the teaching profession. Wood (1987) contends that teaching competence cannot be judged against arbitrary standards and in fact, if reliable judgements are to be made, then competence must be distinguished from competencies. He demands a further *unpacking* of competence including:

> A drawing together of emerging ideas and methodologies relating to the development and assessment of competence in knowledge-filled domains, into models capable of guiding the design of both curricular and teaching and assessment projects (p. 422).

In light of the criticism levelled at the narrow, traditional view of competent human performance, the following section will present a discussion of several alternative views of and approaches to the phenomenon of competence and its appraisal.

2.4.5 Approaches to competence

Sandberg (1994) reports that the development of competence is a very important issue in today's society. Because competent performance is so closely linked with workplace success, there is a recognised demand for efficient processes within education and training. It is also noted by Sandberg that *competence* is a concept only recently introduced by those responsible for training and development within human resource management. For this group, competence refers to the necessary stock of human knowledge and skills for achieving competitive advantage, with its appraisal requiring the deconstruction of work performance in the form of job analysis. However, Sandberg (1994) recognises that human competence at work is not primarily constituted by a list of attributes that are possessed by the worker and externally related to the work, as stipulated by the dominant rationalistic approaches within human resource management.

It follows that the narrow, factory-oriented view of competence has little to contribute to the complex processes involved in education. These traditional views, in reality, merely offer a description of *performance*, not *competent performance*. Messick (1984, p. 227) differentiates the two, as follows:

> Competence refers to what a person knows and can do under ideal circumstances, whereas performance refers to what is actually done under existing circumstances. Competence embraces the structure of knowledge and abilities, whereas performance subsumes as well, the

> processes of accessing and utilising those structures and a host of affective, motivational, attentional and stylistic factors that influence the ultimate responses.

Wood (1987) concurs that it is indeed problematic to infer competence from performance alone. After all, performance delimits what a person can do under ideal circumstances, whereas competence embodies what that person *knows* and can do under similar circumstances. Thus, competence is about human potential, whilst performance relates to actual situated behaviour (Messick, 1984).

It has previously been suggested that recently, the education sector has followed the lead of other contemporary industries in demanding a reliable method of measuring work standards and worker competence. Norris (1991) contends that the concept of competence has thus become associated with a drive towards greater practicality in education, placing a more significant emphasis on the assessment of performance, rather than knowledge. He argues further, that a comprehensive understanding of the contested nature of competence is not possible without an appreciation of the 'troubled history' surrounding the concept. Despite its apparent simplicity, over time, the notion of competence has experienced a series of constructs. Norris (1991) describes a number of approaches to the phenomenon of competence.

Within the *behaviourist* approach the most prevalent approach to human competence rests on a description of behaviour and the situation in which the behaviour is to take place. In this approach, competence comprises a description of action, behaviour or outcome in a form that is capable of demonstration, observation and assessment. Usually, behavioural objectives are defined, as an expression of what is to be learned or achieved. This use of performance criterion indicates the outcome/product orientation of the behaviourist approach.

The *generic* approach involves empirical investigation to establish competencies that are used to differentiate between average and expert performances. It favours the "elicitation through behavioural event or critical incident interviewing of those general abilities associated with expert performers" (Norris, 1991, p. 333). In this

manner, effective performers are identified before a study is conducted to differentiate between their performance and that of an individual who is acknowledged as being less competent. The final step is to identify the specific skills, abilities and characteristics responsible for this difference.

Boreham (1999) recognises a third, rather traditional approach to competence that assumes a representational theory of the mind in which the contents of the mind reflect objects and events in the world outside. This *cognitive* view of competent performance involves the judgment of human competence against technically generated solutions to posed problems. Such an approach attempts to model the physiological structure of the central nervous system in order to train the neural systems to produce desirable outputs from identified inputs.

Despite capturing some aspects of intellectual work, information–processing models of cognition have proved quite inadequate. Although such models might successfully explain performance in narrow, static tasks, they do no provide an appropriate understanding of the competence required in work contexts characterised by flexible teams, altering roles and responsibilities, new technology and the constant need to learn new skills. Norris (1991) argues that none of these approaches has the capacity to accurately measure competent human performance.

Sandberg (1994) adds that traditional approaches to competence have been oriented solely towards either the worker or the work. He suggests that the dominant worker-oriented approaches emphasise attributes possessed by workers, thus identifying those skills, knowledge, abilities and personal traits that are required for effective work performance. In the identification of these elements, groups of *experts* came to a consensus, before rating workers on an agreed-upon scale. Sandberg offers the following list as examples of the types of *competencies* that may be acknowledged in the worker-oriented approach to defining worker competence:

- psychomotor factors – perceptual skills, motor skills;
- cognitive factors – knowledge, intellectual skills;
- affective factors – motivational and emotional conditions for action;

- personal factors – conditions for action related to personality traits;
- social factors – social skills (p. 10).

Within the work-oriented approach, however, the focus shifts from the individual worker to the actual work undertaken. Work activities are identified, before an attempt is made to devise the particular attributes required to competently perform the associated work. The disadvantage of this approach lies in the difficult transformation of work descriptions into desirable attributes.

Although there exist, several approaches to competence and its measurement, none is able to fully explain the many facets of competent human performance. Hager and Beckett (1995) argue that the problem lies in the traditional notion that competence may be identified from an investigation of either the worker or the work. They argue that competence is not one-dimensional, but *relational*. As such, competence is essentially a relation between individual abilities and the satisfactory completion of appropriate tasks. Hager and Beckett (1995, p. 213) claim that to "ignore the essential relational character of competence" results in an inability to capture the "holistic richness of the world."

Furthermore, Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1996) agree that it is not possible to meaningfully separate practitioners from their activities, nor from the situations in which they practise because practice, rather than being fixed or static, is a "dynamic flow produced and reproduced by practitioners" (p. 414). Decontextualising the competence of the worker is therefore problematic. Taylor (1967) originally proposed this notion when he advised industry managers that in order to more successfully define competence and thus ensure a competent workforce, the close relationship between the worker and the work, must be acknowledged. Neither, he suggested, could be developed in isolation of the other.

Sandberg (1994) reinforces the limitations of ignoring the relational nature of the worker and the associated work and has suggested that such ignorance often produces fragmentary descriptions whereby categories for describing a particular competence are often chosen in an ad hoc manner. He further argues that predefinition of competencies (as knowledge, skills or attitudes) does not allow the

capture of a worker's competence in accomplishing the work, nor does it recognise the internal relationship between workers' attributes and work activities.

Such rationalistic approaches assume that the world and the person are externally related to each other, giving rise to an indirect description of human competence at work. However, Sandberg (1994) recognises that the worker can *never* be separated from his/her work, and as a consequence, a description of work activity can never be made independently from the worker involved. Essentially, aspects of human competence may never be reduced to a list of attributes externally related to work.

In promoting an alternative approach to the study of human competence, Sandberg (1994) recognises five categories that interact in the achievement of competent performance. These categories comprise:

- *Theoretical knowledge* of an intellectual and descriptive nature;
- *Practical knowledge* involving skills and tacit knowledge;
- *Capacity to carry out work* where work is expected to be completed in a specific time by workers who feel competent to achieve the desired results;
- *Network of professional contacts* including personal contacts at work and non-personal contacts such as books and manuals;
- *Conception of the work* that explains the workers way of making sense of their work. This category relates to the manner in which the work is carried out and includes elements such as frames of reference, attitudes and values.

Extensive deconstruction of the phenomenon of competence reinforces the popular view that traditional attempts to judge human competence have tended to focus on a single category, thus failing to achieve holistic appraisal. Carmichael (1992) reinforces this limitation and states that competence involves much more than technical skills, expertise, efficiency and desirable personal attributes. Wood and Power (1987) concur, adding that if competence is to be appropriately judged, it must be distinguished from the narrow, technical workplace competencies assessed in contemporary evaluative programs. These researchers recommend a

developmental approach to competence appraisal that is not fixated by operational definitions of what can reasonably be measured. After all:

> Integrated competence moves beyond the mere listing of tasks (what is done on the job), by adding the two holistic dimensions: the practitioner's attributes (what is brought to the doing of the job) and the characteristics of the context or 'situatedness' (where the job is done).
>
> (Hager & Beckett, 1995, p. 6)

As a consequence, these three dimensions of performance must be considered together in order to justify the inference of competent practice.

An approach to human competence that seeks to achieve a more comprehensive view of performance is recommended by Sandberg (1994). This *interpretive* approach to human action is based on the belief that the world is not merely the world, but the world as experienced by someone. As such, the person and the world are internally related through human experience of the surroundings where workers conceive their work as they actively seek contextual understanding. Sandberg (1994, p. 38) justifies his belief through a suggestion that:

> In order to provide more accurate descriptions of human action in organizations, we should investigate the internal logic of human activity. That is, the individual's ways of making sense of their work situations.

Departing from traditional methods of competence appraisal, this contemporary view recommends an audience of the voices of the individuals under investigation. Barnet (1994) agrees that a thorough understanding of human competence cannot be gleaned through mere observation of worker performance. He argues that:

> Ultimately, we shall only fully understand their actions by taking account of their definition of their situations, of their intentions, of their conceptual frameworks and of their forms of life. Full understanding requires that we understand the individual's understandings (p. 75).

These *legitimate voices* must be heard so that research of competence is to come as close as possible to workers' own experiences of their work. Sandberg (1994) believes that competence will be more fully understood if workers' own experiences are made available. Thus, the point of departure of this contemporary approach is the use of data regarding workers' ways of conceiving their world. Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1996) even go so far as to suggest that the ways in which the work is experienced, constitutes the foundation of human competence.

2.5 Chapter summary

The focus of this chapter was an investigation of the current research of relevance to the present study. For the purposes of the research presented here, three major themes were identified and examined. These themes included *beginning teachers, appraisal* and *competence.* Through an overview of various 'stage' theories that explain teacher development as a continuum of stages through which teachers progress, *beginning teachers* were identified as those early career teachers who have not yet reached their second year of full time employment. Further literature was then examined to formulate a 'snapshot' of this particular period in the career of teachers which was seen to be characterised by an emphasis on the procedural elements of classroom practice, including classroom management, planning and a certain amount of self-doubt.

Because beginning teachers are required to serve a period of provisional registration, during which their supervisors must appraise their competence, the chapter continued with an examination of beginning teacher *appraisal.* Literature was reviewed in relation to the Australian context and was discussed in light of the appraisal schemes operating in both England and the USA. Various models of appraisal were identified and critiqued leading to the view that teacher appraisal is often reduced to lists of standardised items such as competency based standards or observable behaviours. Despite the existence of these lists, however, there is a documented dissatisfaction amongst teaching professionals, with the seemingly ad hoc nature of appraisal and the lack of adequate guidance for making judgements of teacher quality. Teachers and education researchers alike, promote a form of

judgement derived from the knowledge base of teaching that is able to more adequately capture the complexity and sophistication of teaching.

The chapter continued with an overview of those aspects of teacher performance that are likely to be considered in the appraisal process. These elements included teacher behaviours within the classroom, contribution to educational teams, relationships with students and student learning outcomes. Further examination of the literature in this area concluded that although it is clear that appraisal of beginning teachers seeks information of teaching behaviour and performance, what is not clear, is an identification of the specific elements of behaviour and performance that are to be judged. The chapter then revealed that the present research sought to add to the 'picture' of beginning teacher competence, through an examination of the concepts of competence held by beginning teachers themselves. It was explained that beginning teacher competence is of interest in the context of the research presented here, due to the compulsory appraisal of Education Queensland beginning teachers, after a period of provisional registration. Such discussion introduced the final theme of the literature review – the phenomenon of *competence.*

The judgement of worker competence is not a recently contested issue, nor one that is unique to the teaching profession. Since the industrial era of the early 1900's, managers have sought to increase profits through the development of worker competence. Further sections of the present chapter outlined the historical perspective of competent performance where worker competence was viewed in a rationalistic way that reduced it to rules, laws and formulas. Transferred to the education context, this approach to competence reduced the role of the teacher to agreed upon lists of skills and behaviours. Ensuing education policy facilitated the development of a variety of workplace initiatives such as competency-based training, key competencies and core skills, yet failed to produce a holistic, appropriate and agreed-upon notion of competent teaching performance. Such narrow views of competence did not allow for the capture of the complexity of human behaviour, nor did they recognise that worker competence could never be reduced to an analysis of either the worker or the work. In the dynamic interplay of a profession such as teaching, one can never separate the worker from the work.

Having flagged the inadequacy of current beliefs about competent teaching performance and the inappropriateness of the related systems of the appraisal of competence, the final sections of the chapter presented an alternative view of competence where *competent performance* is able to be distinguished from mere *performance.* Several approaches to competence were highlighted, including the *behaviourist, generic and cognitive* models, yet attention was drawn to a *relational* model where competence is viewed as a relation between individual abilities and the satisfactory completion of appropriate tasks. This model accepts that competence involves more than technical skills, expertise, efficiency and desirable personal attributes. Alternatively, competence must be viewed a dynamic interplay between workers and their work; and that in uncovering a holistic notion of competent performance, the experience of the worker must be taken into consideration.

As an extension of the relational model of competence, the *interpretive* model argues that phenomenon within the world only exist in terms of how they are experienced by someone. As such, people and their world are internally related through human experience, where workers conceive their work in seeking contextual understanding. Researchers such as Sandberg (1994) argue that if accurate descriptions of human action are to be achieved, investigation must be made into individuals' ways of making sense of their work. Researchers must seek to gather details of the *legitimate voices* of the research participants under investigation.

With chapter two having established the need for a more holistic and accurate model for describing and measuring competent performance, the following chapter will situate this approach in an educational context, before proposing the research specialisation of phenomenography as the most appropriate approach to the study of beginning teacher competence. Phenomenoghraphy has been selected as the investigative method most likely to reveal the concepts of competence held by the beginning teachers involved in the present study.

Chapter Three

Design of the study: A phenomenographic research approach

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a general discussion of phenomenography, detailing its relevance to the present study. Phenomenographic research had its inceptions in studies of learning in the early 1970's. Phenomenography was borne of a reaction against and an alternative to the dominant traditions of positivistic, behavioural and quantitative research favoured at the time. Franz (1994) argues that the phenomenographic research specialisation has gained momentum during the past decade as the knowledge interest shifts attention away from the phenomenon itself, to the phenomenon as experienced by people in various ways.

This chapter will explain the selection of phenomenography as the most appropriate method of uncovering the conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers. It will begin with an explanation of the appropriateness of this line of inquiry for the present study through positioning phenomenography within the qualitative research paradigm. Focus will then shift to a discussion of the nature and purpose of phenomenography, where the research specialisation originated and how it is particularly relevant to an education context. The chapter will continue with a presentation of the different types of phenomenographic inquiry and how such inquiry relates to the research tradition of phenomenology. After presenting the research assumptions relevant to phenomenography, the chapter will outline the major elements involved in phenomenographic research, including an explanation of the importance of the research participants' experience, awareness and conceptions of the phenomenon under investigation. The results of a phenomenographic study, categories of description and outcome space, will then be explained.

Having detailed the general principles of this research specialisation, the chapter will then focus on how phenomenography is utilised in the present study.

Discussion will detail the role of the researcher, the research plan, data collection and research participants. The chapter will then provide an overview of the phenomenographic interview used to uncover the conceptions of a phenomena held by the research participants selected for this study. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the process of data analysis within phenomenography.

3. 2 Selection of research methodology

In designing the present study it is important that the choice of methodology facilitates the collection of data that reflect the experiences of the beginning teacher. The selection of an appropriate methodology should address the purpose of identifying beginning teachers' conceptions of competence. Because human sciences are complex and acknowledge the existence of consciousness, they have, over the past 100 years, recognised the need for and developed alternative research approaches to those recommended within traditional natural science (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Since the 1970's, research within the social sciences has experienced a move away from quantitative data collection and analysis, to an engagement with research participants through observation and questioning. Data collected using these humanistic methods have come to be termed qualitative, as they are gathered through a process of observation, description, asking, listening, analysis and interpretation, rather than those established quantitative processes designed to construct concepts and measure variables (Tesch, 1990).

Having flagged the appropriateness of a qualitative line of inquiry for the present research, the following section of this chapter will discuss the general characteristics of qualitative research, recognising its value in the investigation of issues of educational significance.

3.2.1 Qualitative inquiry

Because quantitative research fails to recognise people's unique ability to interpret, experience and construct meaning and then act on their interpretations, this positivistic approach to investigating the social sciences has been discarded by many educational researchers (Burns, 1990). Fenstermacher (1986) argues that

scientific research methods have no consequence to everyday life, as they deny that humans possess the capacity to act with purpose. Because of the very human nature of education, with its complex interactions and differing understandings and values, Carr and Kemmis (1990) reject the positivist notions of rationality, objectivity and truth, in favour of a less technical, personal form of research methodology. The positivist approach of experimental research calls for manipulation of selected variables by the researcher, thus affording her situational control (Merriam, 1988). Within an education setting, however, such control is not possible, nor desirable as the primary task of the researcher tends to be the gathering of descriptions in the search for explanations.

Qualitative research relies largely on researcher interpretation with its methods typically involving a "non-mathematic process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organising these into a theoretical explanatory scheme" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Qualitative researchers then, study things in their natural settings in an attempt to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings research participants bring to them (Dall'Alba, 1996). The distinct variations between quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry have already been thoroughly considered by others (Saljo, 1988) and consequently, it is not pertinent that such a detailed account will be provided here. Each method enables relevant knowledge within its own research domain, but what is important is that the research question drives the selection of an appropriate methodology.

As a social science, education lends itself to a qualitative process of inquiry that may be used to obtain specific details about certain phenomena. For example, feelings, thought processes and emotions are difficult to extract or learn through more conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1988). Qualitative research already has a tradition in education settings where data collected from humans is not measurable in scientific ways. Eisner and Peshkin (1990) argue that qualitative research has the potential to capture more of the human dimension of education and schooling. They contend that a qualitative methodology is most appropriate where the purpose of the study is to "adopt, create and use a variety of

non quantitative research methods to describe the rich interpersonal, social and cultural contexts of education more fully than can quantitative research." (p. 249). Eisner (1991, p.5) argues that qualitative studies possess the following shared characteristics. Typical studies:

- are field focused;
- relate to self as instrument;
- have an interpretive character;
- use expressive language;
- pay attention to particulars;
- possess the coherence, insight and instrumental utility which make them believable.

The present study reflects these qualitative prerequisites in several ways which may be characterised thus:

- the research will take place in an education setting;
- the objects of the research are the conceptions held by beginning teachers;
- once gathered, the research data will be interpreted by the researcher;
- through verbal account, the research participant will be urged to provide a full and expressive account of the phenomenon under investigation;
- in analysing the data, the researcher will gain a detailed account of the phenomenon;
- through a process of careful data collection, analysis and reporting, the researcher will provide a truthful and trustworthy account of beginning teacher conceptions of competence.

In her overview of qualitative research methods, Tesch (1990) recognises three contexts for research within the social sciences. Firstly, the aim of the research is to investigate the characteristics of language. Secondly, the research seeks to discover regularities and finally, to comprehend the meaning of text or action is the desired outcome.

In a research study that seeks to discover regularities in the conceptions of beginning teacher competence, Tesch's model recognises the appropriateness of phenomenography. Because of its unique ability to investigate the discerning of patterns in conceptualisation, phenomenography represents an appropriate methodology for the present study. Accordingly, the following section of this chapter will describe the processes involved in phenomenographic research and justify its selection as the most appropriate research methodology for the research presented here.

3.3 Phenomenography

To study effectively the conceptions of competence of beginning teachers, the selected research methodology must enable a descriptive recording of the immediate, subjective experience as reported by the research participant (Marton, 1994). In this manner, the phenomenon under investigation will be described through the eyes of the beginning teacher. The present study represents a search for deeper understanding of how the phenomenon of competence is experienced and conceptualised by this particular group of teaching professionals. What is required then is a research approach "for investigating how phenomena appear to people; the qualitatively different ways in which phenomena are experienced and perceived" (Dall'Alba, 1996, p. 8).

In an attempt to report the conceptions of competence of beginning teachers in the most descriptive and relevant manner, this study will utilise the principles of phenomenographic research. Phenomenography is identified as the most appropriate approach to the study of conceptions because:

> It is not concerned solely with the phenomena that are experienced and thought about, or with human beings who are experiencing or thinking about the phenomena. Nor is phenomenography concerned with perception and thought as abstract phenomena, wholly separate from the subjective matter of thought and perception.

> Phenomenography is concerned with the *relations* that exist between human beings and the world around them .
>
> (Marton, 1986, p. 31)

Phenomenographic research, focuses on the *content* and not the *process* of thinking. Through this approach the researcher does not aim to make statements about the world, but alternatively about people's conceptions of the world (Marton, 1986). Moreover, phenomenography does not take as its point of departure, the conceptions of an individual research participant. Instead, it describes the variation of conceptions across a number of participants. Phenomenography then, may be most accurately described as a research method that maps the qualitatively different ways in which people explain, conceptualise, perceive and understand aspects of, and phenomena in the world around them (Bowden, 1994).

Phenomenography is the methodology of choice for the education research proposed here. As a research specialisation, phenomenography has gained popularity in Europe and to a lesser extent, in Australia since it was first reported in the early 1970's. The following section of this chapter will trace the origins of the phenomenographic approach.

3.3.1 Origins of phenomenography

Questioning the relevance of the dominant positivistic paradigm prevalent in the late 1970's, Swedish researchers Ference Marton and Lennart Svensson of the University of Gothenburg, developed an interest in exploring the relationship between *what* and *how* students learn. Their emphasis on the differentiation between the process and outcome of learning led them to question *what*, rather than *how much* students learned. Their investigations of the relationship between the outcome and the process of learning demonstrated that the two were internally related (Dall'Alba, 1996).

Marton and Svensson, in seeking a deeper understanding of learning, expressed the need for a closer investigation of how learning was experienced by the learner. In an attempt to discover how learning was conceived by university students, the

researchers developed a protocol that they termed phenomenography. Firstly, research participants were interviewed to gauge their particular understanding or experience of the selected phenomena (in this case, learning). Tapes were then transcribed and the transcripts extensively analysed to identify a limited number of distinctly different ways of understanding. Marton and Svensson discovered that these different ways of understanding seemed to have logical relationships to each other. Each understanding was then carefully described to identify specific characteristics in relation to the others, thus forming a set of 'categories of description' (Marton, 1994).The notion that different human beings understand the same phenomena in different ways, and that these understandings or conceptions are related and therefore may be mapped, became the cornerstone of phenomenographic research (Booth, 1994).

3.3.2 Educational relevance

Although phenomenographic research is also conducted in areas external to the field of education, its main value has been in the investigation of approaches to learning, approaches to teaching and the understanding of scientific phenomena learned by students (Bowden, 1996).

Bowden supports the value of phenomenographic research through his suggestion that the method was not developed separately from education and then applied to the field, but originally developed in response to questions about education. Since the early 1970's phenomenography has proved to be a valuable strategy in uncovering "qualitative variation in experiences of phenomena in the teaching–learning environment" (Bruce & Gerber, 1994, p. 54). Entwhistle (1997) reinforces the view that this approach has significant value in producing useful insights into the educational experience and argues that such insights are unlikely to be achieved using other methods of research.

Phenomenography utilises relational thinking in the generation of knowledge that has direct educational relevance. Through a process that identifies misconceptions, it assists researchers to understand the phenomenon under investigation. "Learning, thinking and understanding are dealt with as relations between the individual and

that which he or she learns, thinks about and understands" (Marton, 1986, p. 43). Through phenomenographic research, the investigator will come to understand this relationship, thus expanding available pedagogical opportunities.

An assumption of the present study is that no two beginning teachers experience teaching competence in exactly the same way, just as no single research study imposes all possible research frameworks on teaching. Consequently, this study seeks a collection of beginning teacher conceptions of competence with a view to enhancing understanding of how these teachers come to view competence. The results of the study will not reflect the conceptions of any individual beginning teacher, but moreover, provide a description of the "conceptual space" of the group (Liu, 1998, p. 179).

3.3.3 Phenomenographic lines of inquiry

Phenomenography has been recognised as an empirical method of inquiry where the research interest is in the discovery of regularities by discerning patterns in human conceptualisation of the phenomenon under investigation (Tesch, 1990). This method does not however, claim to be a research methodology in itself. "Phenomenography is less a methodology than an explorative and analytic approach to qualitative research" (Barnard, McCosker and Gerber, 1999, p.9). It is an approach that has recognised value in identifying, formulating and tackling certain types of research question, particularly questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an education setting (Marton & Booth, 1997). Svensson (1994, p.11) reinforces the notion that phenomenography may be considered a research approach, yet adds that it is fundamentally a research orientation, including "characteristics of method of a general kind intimately related to the orientation". Phenomenography may be viewed as both a research orientation and a research approach within this orientation. For this reason, Svensson refers to phenomenography as a *research specialisation*.

Phenomenographic research has often been classified into several types according to, for example, the context under which analysed discourses are generated and

documented (Marton, 1994b). The current study however, is structured in relation to one of the three lines of phenomenographic research originally identified by Marton (1988). These types include:

- research that focuses on general aspects of learning including relations between perceptions, approaches and outcomes;
- research that focuses on describing students' content-oriented preconceived ideas and how these change;
- research that focuses on how people conceive of various aspects of reality.

This research project investigates the conceptions of competence of beginning teachers and is therefore considered to reflect Marton's third line of inquiry. This type of phenomenographic study is often referred to as pure phenomenography as it does not specifically deal with the phenomena of learning, but may be utilised to investigate the ways in which people conceive of any specific aspect of their world (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999). Although the results of this study will have implications for beginning teachers, principals and the providers of teacher education, these phenomenographic results will be sufficiently worthwhile in their own right. Renstrom, Andersson and Marton (1990, p. 1) reinforce this notion when they argue that:

> Questions about how and why the different conceptions develop have attracted much interest, as have questions about how changes between conceptions can be bought about in educational contexts. But there has also been a purely descriptive 'knowledge interest'. Within such a framework it is a legitimate and reasonable aim for investigators simply to identify and characterise the different ways in which a certain phenomenon is understood.

Having introduced the research specialisation of phenomenography, the following section will discuss its relationship to another qualitative line of inquiry, termed phenomenology.

3.3.4 Relation to phenomenology

Despite sharing a history in older traditions such as Gestalt psychology, phenomenography cannot be seen to be part of the phenomenological research tradition (Svensson, 1994). Although both approaches belong to a field of knowledge defined by experience as the subject of study, they differ in purpose. Where phenomenology seeks to capture the richness of experience through description of a person's lifeworld, phenomenography asks "what are the critical aspects of the ways of experiencing the world that make people able to handle it in more or less efficient ways?" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 117).

One of the most critical variations between these two research approaches is the perspective adopted by the researcher. Phenomenology relies on a first order perspective where the phenomenon under investigation is viewed through the eyes of the investigator. Through this method, it is impossible to separate that which is experienced, from the experience itself. Phenomenography however, seeks to describe the phenomenon through the eyes of the research participants. This second order perspective enables the researcher to describe things, not as they are, but how they appear to other people (Marton, 1986). "Phenomenographers do not claim to study 'what is there' in the world (reality), but they do claim to study 'what is there' in peoples' conceptions of the world" (Webb, 1997, p. 200).

Another element separating these two approaches is the notion that phenomenology "assumes that student conceptions of a natural phenomenon reside within the minds of students and through an internal action of creative imagination the researcher can create the reality of individual student conception" (Liu, 1998, p.179). In contrast, phenomenography draws no dividing line between people and their natural world. Both elements interact to form various relations. The task of the researcher then, is to develop stable categories of description to interpret the variation in the relations of participant conceptions.

Marton (1981) suggests that phenomenology aims to capture a central 'essence' as the common intersubjective meaning of the aspect of reality under investigation. Conversely, phenomenography seeks not one essence, but a limited number of

qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon. The aim of phenomenography then is "not to find the singular essence, but the variation and the architecture of this variation in terms of the different aspects which define the phenomena" (Marton, 1996, p. 188).

Finally, phenomenology directs its investigation towards a person's pre-reflective level of consciousness, aiming to describe either "what the world would look like without having learned how to see it or how the taken-for-granted world of our everyday existence is lived (Marton, 1981). Alternatively, phenomenography deals with both the conceptual and the experiential, in addition to "what is thought of as that which is lived" (p.181).

Having outlined the major differences in the approaches of phenomenography and phenomenology, the following section will focus on the specific assumptions associated with the phenomenographic line of inquiry.

3.3.5 Assumptions about phenomenography

Within phenomenography, the specific aim of describing conceptions implies some general assumptions. "By describing these assumptions, the researcher clarifies the conditions under which the results are valid" (Larsson, 1998, p. 4). This section will discuss the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions relevant to a phenomenographic investigation.

Ontological assumptions deal with the nature of the research interest, in this case, the conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers. Within phenomenography, knowledge is assumed to have a relational and holistic nature and to be based on thinking and created through human thinking and human activity. In addition, knowledge is assumed to be dependent on a world or reality external to this human thinking and activity. As such, knowledge and conceptions have a relational nature whereby human conceptions are dependent on both human activity and the external world where "reality presents itself in human thinking as different related entities having the character of forming units or wholes." (Svensson, 1994, p. 15).

A fundamental epistemological assumption of phenomenography relates to the importance of description in the research process. Svensson (1994) notes the fruitlessness of extensive description of data and phenomenon, emphasising however, the importance of reduction and abstraction to obtain summary descriptions of elements of the data that correspond to conceptions of phenomena. In this manner, data is abstracted and condensed as to meaning, finally being grouped into categories. “The categories are not general characterisations of the conceptions but forms of expressing the conceptions.” (p. 17).

In phenomenographic research, the methodological assumption is that data collection is exploratory in nature, with a main focus of contextual analysis on differentiating elements of the data. The exploration of the whole must be the focus and an exploration of parts has to be conducted within the whole (Svensson, 1997, p. 170).

With a discussion of the major research assumptions of phenomenography complete, attention will now focus on defining important terminology. Within phenomenography there is a number of important elements that set this research specialisation apart from more traditional forms of qualitative inquiry. Before undertaking a phenomenographic study, it is important to understand the differentiation of human *experience* of, as opposed to *awareness* of a particular phenomenon. At its core, phenomenographic research seeks an individual’s *conceptions* of the specific *phenomenon* under investigation. In this study, beginning teachers will be interviewed to gather a ‘pool’ of conceptions about the phenomenon of competence. Having gathered the interview data, analysis will identify a number of *categories of description* within a recognised *outcome space*. The following sections will provide a more detailed explanation of these unique phenomenographic elements.

3.4 Experience and awareness

At its core, phenomenography is “simply an attempt to capture critical differences in how we experience the world and how we learn to experience the world” (Marton, 1996, p. 18). It does not involve a complex investigation of how we

become aware of such experiences, but alternatively attempts to truthfully describe experience through the eyes of the research participant. Phenomenographic discussion then, is not complete without an explanation of experience and awareness in a phenomenographic context.

Within phenomenography, experience is defined as an internal relationship between a person and the world, or something within the world (Marton, 1996; Marton & Pang, 1999). Franz (1994, p. 176) maintains that "experience represents a dialectical relationship involving people in a particular situation." Fundamental to phenomenography is the notion that experience may never be described simply in terms of people or phenomena, but how people interact with phenomena - how they experience a phenomenon. Experience is always experience of something. It may not be passed off as a mental entity or act. Because it is neither physical nor material, it may not be represented by description of a phenomenon. Experience comprises an internal relationship between a person and the world in which that person lives.

Phenomenography aims at a description of the experience of people but "because we can never describe experience in its entirety, we are constrained to look for and describe critical differences in people's capabilities for explaining the phenomena in which we are interested" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 123). Marton (1996) argues that a basic principle of phenomenography relates to the notion that whatever phenomenon is experienced by a human being, may only be done in a limited number of qualitatively different ways. Through an investigation of the experience of a number of research participants, variation in conceptions may be mapped into categories of description.

Human experience thus represents a vital element in phenomenographic research. In addition, within this form of investigation the notions of experience and awareness are not mutually exclusive, with awareness described as the totality of our experiences (Marton, 1996). Marton (1996) explains further, that the search for critical differences in the manner in which people experience particular phenomena, should be conducted in light of the nature of each person's awareness. He maintains that humans do not have the capacity to be aware of everything at the

same time, in the same way. Even though we may be aware of everything at one time, our awareness is layered. In this manner those elements that are most important constitute the *core* of our awareness, with lesser important elements moved to the *field* of awareness. Those elements that have least impact at any given time are situated at the outer fringe of our awareness. It is important to note that although humans may not be consciously aware of which elements constitute the fringe, these elements will be drawn to the core if and when they become relevant.

Marton (1992) suggests that a person's way of explaining the world equates with the internal relation between the subject (person) and the object (phenomenon). This internal relation or way in which the object appears to people is described as being constituted a *structurally* and *referentially* (Bruce, 1996). The structural characteristics refer to the notion that when describing an experience, a person operates on two levels of understanding, constituting an internal and an external horizon. The internal horizon is that which registers an individual's immediate awareness of experience. It comprises those designated characteristics of a phenomenon that are based on understanding that is clear and accepted. The external horizon however, contains that awareness which surrounds, but is more distant from the internal horizon.

This external horizon resides at the outer boundary of human understanding and contains ideas and explanations that are unclear. Understanding and explanation at this level are vague and thus, prereflective. Rich description by a research participant within the external horizon of awareness may require supportive prompting by the researcher. The importance of the conditions under which phenomenographic data is collected will be explained in a subsequent section of this chapter. The following section however, presents a discussion of *conceptions* and *phenomena*–the knowledge interests of phenomenography.

3.5 Conceptions and phenomena

In the research specialisation of phenomenography, the knowledge interest is in a description of the different conceptions of a phenomenon that are identifiable

within groups of people in a specific context (Bruce, 1996; Hasselgren & Beach, 1997). The purpose of this study is to apply phenomenographic principles to research investigating beginning teachers' conceptions of teaching competence, in order to identify the structural characteristics of beginning teacher conceptions. Because the nature of a conception is central to phenomenography, Svensson (1989) has presented a series of definitions to explain the subtle difference in terminology. According to Svensson:

- a concept refers to that abstract general meaning attributed to a phenomenon as it is presented in a language;
- a conception is that experienced meaning of a phenomenon;
- a conceptualisation is a cognitive activity through which a conception is constituted.

Described simply, a conception is a way of being aware of something – the manner in which a person explains a specific aspect of reality (Sandberg, 1996). Marton, Dall' Alba and Beaty (1993, p. 278) refer to a conception as "a certain delimitation of a phenomenon from the context or background and of its component parts and the relations between them". In a phenomenographic sense, conceptions represent a form of knowledge of the world around us. "Conceptions are constituted in acts of consciousness in which the internal relations between perceptual and conceptual elements are explicitly realised" (Dahlin, 1994, p. 87). Conceptions comprise knowledge that makes sense of phenomena within the world, but they do not represent knowledge in a purely abstract sense. Alternatively, the knowledge within a conception is reliant upon understanding. "Our conception of something is a constituent part of our actual understanding of that thing" (Dahlin, 1994, p. 88).

Francis (1996) suggests that other research methods use preconceptions which are derived from an individual's reflection on a past experience. Alternatively within the phenomenographic research process, the research participant is urged to identify a particular kind of conception and then think and talk freely about it. It is important to note that these other research methodologies guide the interviewee through questions based on the *researcher's* conception. In this manner "there is a

sense in which the interviewee's reflection on a topic is a view through the eyes of the interviewer" (Francis, 1994, p. 36). When conducting a phenomenographic interview however, all care is taken to gather descriptions of phenomena that are faithful to the understanding and experience of the research participant.

A conception is the phenomenon as experienced and described by a person and as such, a conception constitutes an internal relation. The relation captured between the person and the phenomena is internal, but also contextual. This relation and subsequent conception may alter if the context alters. As a conception emerges, the person and the phenomenon establish a context for each other (Ekblad & Bond, 1994). Accordingly, phenomenographic research demands that the researcher play a vital role in establishing for the research participant, the nature and context of the phenomenon under investigation.

Dahlin (1994, p. 93) maintains that conceptions are not constructed but "constituted in acts of consciousness" from the interplay between perception and thinking. This process cannot separate the object (person) from the subject (phenomenon) as a person's experience of a phenomenon is constituted in a relation between the two. Phenomenography assumes that there does not exist a real or objective world and those mental representations that make up a subjective world. Conversely, the non-dual ontology of phenomenographic research relates to the notion of one world that is experienced and understood by different people in different ways.

Studies by Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty (1993) into the nature of conceptions reveal a number of possible components. They suggest that human conceptions have referential aspects relating to the global meaning attributed to a phenomenon, in addition to structural aspects that relate to the manner in which the phenomenon and its component parts are delimited and related to each other. As individuals rarely express a conception in its entirety, but may instead emphasise one or more component parts, a phenomenographic researcher must take care to avoid choosing selected statements. Alternatively, she should consider the entire context, meaning and perspective expressed by the research participant. In a search for detailed and

meaningful descriptions, phenomenography often promotes the interview as the most appropriate method of data collection. After all, although conceptions may be expressed in different forms of action, they are most accessible through language (Svensson, 1994). A later section of this chapter will discuss the manner in which a phenomenographic interview should be conducted.

The preceding discussion has revealed the nature and characteristics of conceptions, but what is their significance? What may be gained from an investigation of human conceptions? Svensson (1989) suggests that rather than investigating the *cognitive processes* involved in the formation of human differences and changes in understanding, the purpose of a study of conceptions is to examine the dominant characteristics of the actual *differences* and *changes* themselves. Conceptions determine judgement, direct inquiry and explain the every day lives and activities of human beings (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1994). If we are aware of our conceptions we therefore become aware of our social reality and of ourselves.

Within a phenomenographic study the researcher concentrates on the description, experience and understanding of a phenomenon, seeking to obtain a research outcome that identifies and describes discrete conceptions. Marton (1981) maintains that across any research group, there will be a limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing, understanding and describing a phenomenon. A study of how a specific phenomenon is conceived by a group of individuals will hence facilitate the identification of several recognised categories of description. Phenomenography is focused on the ways of experiencing different phenomena. Its aim is not to find a singular essence but the variation and the architecture of this variation in terms of the different aspects that define the phenomena (Marton, 1994b).

This section will conclude with a number of assumptions regarding human conceptions. Compiled by Bruce (1996), these assumptions are the result of multiple phenomenographic studies by both Marton and Svensson:

- the most important element of conceptions is the relation between subject and object, therefore any conception must have at least two related parts, together creating meaning;
- dialectically related structural and referential components characterise the internal relation (Marton, 1992);
- conceptions represent the organised content of thinking (Svensson, 1994);
- conceptions are dependent on both human activity and the world or reality external to the individual (Svensson, 1994);
- the relation between thought and external reality is varying in character (Svensson, 1994);
- conceptions are not entirely naturally given entities, neither are they totally subjectively constituted entities (Svensson, 1994).

Specifically, a phenomenographic study of conceptions has its focus on people's experience, in order to provide a fresh understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The discussion in this section has shed light upon the importance of conceptions and phenomena as the knowledge interests within phenomenography. The following section will provide an overview of the categories of description and outcome space that represent the results of a phenomenographic study.

3.6 Categories of description and outcome space

If a conception is described as a way of experiencing something in the world, then a category of description refers to "a way of describing a way of experiencing something" in the world. (Marton, 1996, p. 180). It has previously been established that phenomenography aims to identify a limited number of distinctively different ways of understanding that seem to be logically related to each other. After the research participants carefully describe their conceptions, the researcher seeks to identify special characteristics for understanding that vary from other understandings, thus developing *categories of description*. It is important to note that the focus of phenomenography is on variation, however, "one is looking for qualitatively different ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question,

regardless of whether the differences are differences between or within individuals" (Marton, 1996, p. 182).

Marton (1981) argues that traditional research methods have concentrated their attention on the source of the variation and not the variation itself. Phenomenography however, aims to reach a description of variation on a collective level where individual voices become secondary to variations between individuals. Through the use of these "stripped descriptions" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 114) the essential meaning of different ways of experiencing phenomenon are retained without "individual flavours, scents and colours of the world" (p. 114).

The general protocol of phenomenographic research suggests that meaningful data are collected from a number of research participants who are asked to describe their conceptions of the phenomena under investigation. The transcribed details of these interviews are then closely read and reread in a search for common understandings within and across the participants. Marton (1981) has established that there exists a limited number of qualitatively different ways of understanding a phenomenon. Once these conceptions have been identified, they are categorised and the relationships amongst them are explored. These categories of description are formed from careful analysis of abstracted interview data and are assumed to represent the empirical subjects' conceptions as they are manifested in the interview protocols (Uljens, 1996). Categories of description do not claim to analyse research participants' experience, but moreover their ways of functioning. They describe similarities and difference in meaning and have "characteristics that represent the central meaning of conceptions" (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999, p. 7).

An effective phenomenographic interviewer will facilitate and maintain the interviewee's ability to express an accurate reflection of the phenomenon in question. It should be noted however, that distinctly different ways of experiencing the phenomenon discussed in the interview are the units of analysis and not the single individual's (Marton, 1994b). Relevant data are not 'owned' by particular interviewees, but extracted from the pool of interview transcripts and condensed to portray meaning. Common meanings are subsequently presented as categories. After comparison, these categories are then grouped as expressions of

understanding. It is generally accepted that "categories of description are a form of expressing conceptions of the object of the study within the context of the reality portrayed by interviewees that may or may not describe the entire range of possible conceptions of a phenomenon" (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999, p. 7). A category of description then, is simply an abstract 'tool' used to characterise understanding across a research population.

Marton (1988, p. 181) maintains that categories of description share four primary characteristics. According to him categories of description are:

- relational as they deal with conceptions comprising a relation between the subject and the object of the study;
- experiential as they are derived from the experience of participants in the study;
- content–oriented as they are focused on the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation;
- qualitative or descriptive as they are based on the meaningful description provided by research participants.

Categories of description are developed in relation to each other and in relation to the data from which they are derived (Bruce, 1996). "For a particular phenomenon, they are considered to form a set of ordered categories in which logical relations exist between categories" (Burns, 1994, p. 73). Once established, the sets of categories aim to be generalisable. After gathering faithful descriptions the researcher will "categorise them and relate discovered categories in ways that are widely and fundamentally meaningful across such leaner/content/context systems" (Francis, 1996, p. 37).

The generalisable knowledge discovered through phenomenographic research is perhaps the characteristic that holds most attraction for education researchers seeking knowledge that is transferable across various educational settings. For example "to develop childrens' understanding of their own learning, it helps if the

teacher knows how the child's conceptions of this phenomenon come about" (Pramling, 1995, p. 137). Marton (1981) explains that such knowledge is transferable between contexts because the same categories of description may appear in different situations. A set of categories is stable and generalisable between situations, even if individuals transfer from one category to another. Phenomenographic analysis differs from other forms of qualitative analysis in that it does not seek categories that will classify individuals, but alternatively establishes categories for describing ways of perceiving the world.

The main results of a phenomenographic study are the categories of description corresponding to those differing understandings and the logical relations that can be established between them. Marton and Booth (1997) suggest that categories of description, representing the qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon form a hierarchy of increasing complexity of experience. They further maintain that this complex of categories of description capturing the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon constitutes the *outcome space*.

Bruce (1996, p. 87) contends that outcome space is manifested as "diagrammatic representations of the logical relationships between the different conceptions of a phenomenon". As such, it provides a structural framework of the categories of description that denote the conceptions experienced by research participants. Saljo (1988) builds on this picture of outcome space by suggesting that it forms a map of the different ways a phenomenon is experienced amongst groups of individuals. Marton (1994) states simply that, just as categories of description represent conceptions, outcome space represents phenomena.

The structure of an outcome space is established according to the principles of logical complexity and conceptual content (Dahlin, 1994). Conceptions with richer conceptual content are considered more complex and are placed higher on the structural hierarchy than the more simple conceptions. In the development of this hierarchical outcome space only logical and conceptual characteristics of conceptions are considered. Pramling (1995) argues that an ideal outcome space

will contain all of the possible ways of experiencing something, thus constituting the phenomenon under investigation. By referring to outcome space, the categories of description can be compared with one another to judge how appropriate, in relation to specific criteria, is the understanding they represent (Marton, 1994b). As the results of a phenomenographic study, the outcome space of categories of description attempts to truthfully outline the space of generative possibilities for relating with the investigated phenomenon (Ekeblad, 1994).

Preceding discussion has provided answers to the ontological questions of what is researched within a phenomenographic study. The following section will address the methodological questions relating to how phenomenographic research is conducted.

3.7 Implementation of the study

This section will present a detailed account of how phenomenography was used to investigate the conceptions of competence of beginning teachers. Specifically, it will discuss the role of the researcher, the research plan, collection of data, analysis of data and ensuring trustworthy results.

3.7.1 Role of the researcher

Marton and Booth (1997, p. 128/129) argue that in constituting the object of phenomenographic research, the researcher must delimit the phenomenon that is central to her interest. Specifically, they suggest that it is the responsibility of the researcher to:

- thoroughly contemplate the identified phenomenon;
- discern its structure against the backgrounds of the situations in which it might be experienced;
- distinguish is salient features;
- look at it with the eyes of the research participant.

It is only through this second order perspective that an accurate account of human conceptions may be collected for analysis.

Other forceful exponents of the second order perspective are Ashworth and Lucas (2000) who reinforce the importance of avoiding researcher bias. They maintain that bias may be minimised through the adoption of the phenomenological tool of *bracketing*. Bracketing has been promoted by several researchers (Marton & Booth, 1997; Sandberg, 1997) and refers to the researcher's formal attempt to put aside her own understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. "At every stage of the phenomenographic project the researcher has to step back consciously from her own experience of the phenomenon and use it only to illuminate the ways in which others are talking of it, handling it, experiencing it and understanding it" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 121). If successful, bracketing enables the researcher to disregard anything that would distract her from the experience of the research participants. In the provision of practical advise to researchers conducting phenomenographic investigations, Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p.8) suggest a number of guidelines that enhance the ability of the researcher to concentrate fully on the experience and understanding of the research participant alone. They promote the avoidance of:

- importing to the present study, the findings of earlier research;
- assuming pre-given theoretical structures on participants' interpretations;
- presupposing the researcher's personal knowledge and belief;
- assuming, prior to the acquaintance with the nature of the experience itself, specific research techniques. Assumptions built into the techniques tend to bend the data found using those techniques to a particular form that may be incommensurate with the aim of securing clarity concerning [student] experience;
- a concern to uncover the 'cause' of certain forms of [student] experience. It would be a distortion to import researcher's notions of cause and effect into the description of the experience.

By adhering to these guidelines, the researcher is more likely to achieve the phenomenographic goal of revealing, not researcher expectations, but rather research participant experience.

As with any endeavour, the process of conducting a research study is more likely to run smoothly and achieve worthwhile results if a predetermined plan is utilised. The following section will discuss the necessity to carefully plan a phenomenographic study whilst providing a planning framework.

3.7.2 Research plan

It is the contention of Bowden (1996) that worthwhile research begins with a clear intention, planned around a specified purpose. This identified purpose then provides a focus for and guides the action of the entire research process. To maximise the opportunity to deliver positive outcomes, Bowden (1996) further recommends the adoption of a detailed research plan which forms a methodological framework for the study. His recognised stages are characterised as follows:

1. Identification of research purpose.
2. Planning of research strategies.
3. Data collection
   - from whom?
   - why?
   - how?
4. Analysis
   - how carried out?
   - who does it?
5. Interpretation
   - context of study?
   - context of application?
   - when is it no longer phenomenography?

Having previously explained the purpose of the present study and justified the selection of the phenomenographic specialisation, the following sections of this chapter will provide details of the next two stages of Bowden's plan, data

collection and data analysis. Chapter Four will then discuss the final stage of interpretation.

3.8 Data collection

Any decisions that relate to collection of data within a phenomenographic study must carefully consider the universal purpose of phenomenography, which is to investigate the differing ways in which people experience, perceive, comprehend, understand and conceptualise various phenomena in and aspects of their world (Marton, 1994). Also considered, must be the actual purpose of the proposed research. The researcher should identify the broad objectives of the study and the phenomenon to be investigated, whilst recognising that her meaning of this phenomenon may vary significantly from the meaning adopted by the research participant (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). As the present study seeks to identify the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which beginning teachers conceptualise competence, the first decision relating to the data collection must seek an answer to the question, from whom will the data be collected?

3.8.1 Phenomenographic data – from whom?

Marton and Booth (1997, p. 125) contend that the research group should comprise a "smallish number of people chosen from a particular population". Similarly, Merriam (1988) does not specify the actual size of the group, but argues that the number of research participants selected should enable the maximum possibility of identifying variation in participant understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. She refers to this research group size as a *purposive sample.* Ashworth and Lucas (2000) contend that participant selection should avoid presuppositions regarding either the nature of the phenomenon or the nature of the conceptions held by particular 'types' of individuals. The researcher must however, attempt to procure the conceptions of individuals who represent a variety of experience of the phenomenon. Should the researcher use intuition in this

selection process, “such assumptions should be identified and set aside in the sense of acknowledging them and being aware of the possibility that they are false” (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 13).

Marton (1988) and Franz (1994) recommend a research group of between 15 and 30 participants to best achieve the aims of phenomenographic enquiry. Consequently, in planning the present study it was decided to research the conceptions of a group of 18 Bachelor of Education (Primary) graduates at the end of their first year of full time teaching. These graduates were seen to represent a cross section of beginning teachers thus maximising the range of perspective’s encountered. Those selected were also appropriate in the context of the purpose for which the outcomes of this study would be placed (Bowden, 1996).

Although now working in one education region in South East Queensland, the research participants had graduated from a variety of teacher preparation programs and were currently teaching in a number of contexts including preschools, primary schools, secondary schools and special schools, within systems managed by Catholic Education, the Independent sector and Education Queensland. Because these teachers represented a range of teaching contexts, they were presumed to possess the variety of experience that is so valued in phenomenographic research.

Marton and Booth (1997, p. 120) contend that when collecting data for a phenomenographic study, it is vital that the participants’ “experiences are reflected in statements about the world”. It is important therefore, that the participants have sufficient trust in the researcher to willingly and openly share these personal and professional statements. Bruce (1996) reinforces this belief and suggests that although phenomenographic data gathering has no formal procedure, it should be sufficiently open to allow research participants to express their personal manner of structuring aspects of reality relating to a particular phenomenon. This openness is more likely to be achieved if a previous relationship has been developed between the researcher and the researched. Once research participants were selected, a decision had to be made regarding the most effective means of obtaining

meaningful data for the study. The following section provides justification of the data gathering method employed in the present study.

3.8.2 Phenomenographic interview – why?

It has been established that a phenomenographic study seeks human conceptions of a specific aspect of the world. Marton (1986) argues that these conceptions may be revealed in several ways including drawing, products of peoples' work and the manner in which people behave under controlled conditions. Both Marton and Svensson (1994) however, believe that conceptions are most accessible through peoples' language. Based on this assumption, the present study selected a one-to-one interview as the principle means of data collection. Bruce (1994) recommends the individual participant format over the focus group format because it enhances the focus of the interviewee, it enables the researcher to probe further details and it allows for constant clarification of meaning and intention on the part of the interviewee. A major disadvantage of the focus group revealed by Bruce (1994), is that it often facilitates the move towards a common understanding, not the required individual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Other forceful exponents of the interview are Ramsden and Dodds (1989) who believe that this method of data collection is the most effective in an education setting. They maintain that the interview context enables the researcher to fully explain the purpose of the research and to ask open-ended questions that seek rich, descriptive responses. The interview has the added advantage of allowing the researcher to continually check for understanding. Once this shared reference has been established, it may then be negotiated throughout the interview. This enables the maintenance of a common focus between the researcher and the research participant, by engaging participants in a process of reflection on the specified phenomenon (Ekeblad & Bond, 1994; Gonzalez, 2001).

It has been established that "individuals' conceptions of a phenomena have traditionally been revealed by interviewing individual respondents" (Russell &

Massey, 1994, p. 334). Bruce (1996) expands this concept and recommends specifically, the phenomenographic interview as the method most likely to elicit data that is meaningful within phenomenography. She argues that "phenomenographic interviews are distinctive from other qualitative research interviews in that their specific purpose is to seek variation in people's experience or understanding of the phenomenon in question (Bruce, 1996, p. 98). Within a phenomenographic interview, attention should not focus on the person nor the phenomenon, but rather the relation between the two. This relationship constitutes how the phenomenon is experienced by the person and it is a description of this experience that is sought in the interview.

Kvale (1983, p. 174) agrees that as a specialised form of qualitative interview, the phenomenographic interview is the most useful in gathering "descriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomenon". He concedes that phenomenography sometimes uses written discourse, but that the interview is more appropriate as it gives the interviewee greater freedom of expression. It is also more interactive, allowing the interviewer to continually check the meaning attributed to the words used by the research participant. Finally, he argues that more descriptive data may be gathered verbally, as people tend to be more comfortable speaking than they are writing. This belief is reinforced by Bruce (1994) who argues that the most appropriate means of obtaining human conceptions should be identified as that which allows maximum freedom for research participants to describe their experience.

In recommending the phenomenographic interview technique, Kvale (1983, p. 174) summarises the reasons why this specialised interview format is most likely to elicit useful data for phenomenographic analysis. According to him, phenomenographic interviews:

- are centred in the interviewee's lifeworld;
- seek to understand meaning of the phenomenon in the interviewee's lifeworld;
- are qualitative, descriptive, specific and presuppositionless;
- are focussed on certain themes;
- are open to ambiguities and change;

- take place in interpersonal interaction;
- may be a positive experience for the interviewee.

The phenomenographic interview does not attempt to study mental processes, nor does it wish to enter the participant's mind. It does however seek evidence of how the world appears to the participants involved in the study (Kvale, 1996; Saljo, 1997). For these reasons, phenomenographic interviews were used as the data gathering technique in this study. Having established the appropriateness of this interview format for the present study, the following section will explain how the phenomenographic interview is conducted.

3.8.3 Phenomenographic interview – how?

Bruce (1994) suggests that the theory of phenomenology offers much to the phenomenographic interview protocol. This concept is reinforced by Spinelli (1989, p. 17-18) who argues that an effective phenomenographic interview adheres to the following phenomenological rules of reduction:

1. The rule of epoche or phenomenological bracketing necessitates the interviewer putting aside her preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, a concerted effort was made by the researcher to enter the interviews with an open mind as to what meanings might be assigned to the conception of competence. The researcher conceded that she had my own conceptions of teaching competence, but made a concerted effort, not to allow these personal understandings to interfere with how the interview was conducted.

2. The rule of description expresses the need to describe, rather than explain the interviewee's experience of the phenomenon. During the interviews in this study, the researcher was careful to ensure that the research participants understood the importance of simply providing descriptions of the phenomenon, rather than explanations of how or why the phenomenon was experienced in a particular way. At times, the interviewees needed to be refocussed and reminded of the purpose of the interview.

3. The rule of horizontalisation requires that all descriptions of experiences are assigned equal value or significance. It is inappropriate for the researcher to assign interpreted importance to any particular descriptions provided by interviewees. In facilitating the success of the subsequent phase of data analysis, all collected data must be treated as being equally significant.

As with each stage of the phenomenographic research process, the stage of data collection must reflect and inform the phenomenographic aim of discovering a set of different ways in which groups of individuals understand a specific aspect of their world (Pramling, 1995). Phenomenography is based on the assumption that because all humans have different experiences, a phenomenon will appear differently to each individual. The purpose of the phenomenographic interview then, is to ask questions that will open up the thoughts and reflections of interviewees, enabling them to express their conceptions. According to Francis (1996, p. 38) the primary aim of the interview is "to have the interviewee thematise the phenomenon of interest and make the thinking explicit". This chapter has previously established there exists a number of conceptions that may be experienced in relation to a specific phenomenon (Marton, 1981). The aim of the phenomenographic interview then, is to tease out these conceptions for subsequent categorisation.

Barnard, McCosker and Gerber (1999, p. 222) maintain that the most appropriate method of collecting phenomenographic data is a semi-structured interview "in which the relation of the individual to his or her experience of the phenomenon is highlighted and described to understand another person's meaning his or her explanation of a phenomenon". Although the interview is exploratory and directive, these researchers emphasise the need for sensitivity to the manner in which the research participant delimits the object of study. It is most desirable that interviewees reflect on their experience of this object, if the necessary data is to be obtained. In this manner, awareness of experience is tapped through reflection and report (Francis, 1996).

Bruce (1994) also recommends the semi-structured interview format and suggests that one or two key questions should be prepared. These questions should lead the interviewee to a discussion of how they see, experience or understand the selected phenomenon. The questions should be sufficiently open-ended to allow interviewees to structure their own response, this tapping their lived experience (Bruce, 1994). It is also the contention of Marton (1986c) that open-ended questions are preferable as they enable the participant to choose the dimensions of the question they wish to answer. He argues that these choices provide valuable data through the revelation of aspects of each individual's relevance structure. In utilising this open-ended style, Bruce (1994) promotes the use of 'what' questions to elicit the desired description of the relation between research participant and phenomenon. For this reason the present study utilised the following interview questions to facilitate discussion:

1. What does it mean to be a competent beginning teacher?
2. What does it mean to be an incompetent beginning teacher?
3. How did you know when you were competent?
4. How did your principal know when you were competent?

Within a phenomenographic interview the interviewer has a distinctive role in attempting to create an atmosphere where she is able to see the phenomenon as it is seen by the interviewee (Bruce, 1994). Ashworth and Lucas (2000) suggest that the interview should be regarded as a conversational partnership where the interviewee is provided with maximum opportunity to reflect on the object under investigation. It is the task of the interviewer then, to facilitate this process of reflection through empathetic listening, coupled with a conscious effort to silence her own concerns, preoccupations and judgements. Marton and Booth (1997) reinforce the importance of the interview partnership but describe the role of the interviewer as necessarily aloof. They stress the need for researcher sensitivity to prepare and maintain a relationship requiring them to hover between keeping a consciously calculated distance, whilst getting as close as possible.

Another vital task for the phenomenographic interviewer is to keep the interview in focus. Marton and Booth (1997, p.59) define focus as "the way in which the

interviewees understand the chosen concept" and stress the importance of maintaining this vision throughout the interview. These researchers suggest that the interviewer may need to provide alternative questions to re-establish a focus of reflection, or alternatively offer interpretations of previously expressed thoughts. In facilitating this focus however, the interviewer must be alert that her own assumptions, beliefs and opinions, rather than the interviewee's experience, are not directing the conversation (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

In addition to redirecting the focus of the interview, the phenomenographic interviewer may be required to confront and pursue areas of confusion, especially if these areas are within the participant's external horizon of understanding. At such time, it may be necessary to supply further questions that probe and extend the interviewee's description of experience or understanding (Bruce, 1994). The interviewer may also be required to seek further explanation to enable examples to be gleaned that "make clear the intent and language of the interviewee" (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999, p. 8). As a brief summary of the distinctive implementation of the phenomenographic interview, Bruce (1994) offers the following guidelines. According to her, the interview should:

- encourage reflection on experience;
- seek information about how the phenomenon appears to the interviewee;
- probe for analogies;
- confront/pursue areas of confusion;
- seek elaboration in the form of additional statements such as 'Please explain….' or 'Describe further…'.

Francis (1996) completes this overview with a suggestion that an effective interviewer will provide each interviewee with an opportunity to 'agree' with the interviewer's record of his conceptions and will prepare a report based on data which is faithful to the experience of the research participant. By "oscillating between being active and passive in a dialogue", the interviewer must develop and maintain a shared focus of the phenomenon under investigation (Pramling, 1995, p. 138).

This section examined the manner in which phenomenographic data was collected in the present study. Details were provided as to the appropriateness of the phenomenographic interview and how this particular interview format was conducted. In keeping with Bowden's (1996) research process, the following section will address the issue of data analysis.

3.9 Data analysis

As with all other phases of the phenomenographic research process, the analysis of data should be driven by the main aim of the study (Renstrem, Andersson & Marton, 1990). Bruce (1996, p. 103) suggests that "data analysed in a phenomenographic study continues the process of exploring the subject–object relations begun when data gathering". Accordingly, the analysis process should uncover various concepts to be represented in the form of categories of description. Bruce (1996) maintains further that analysis will terminate with the presentation of two specific outcomes. The researcher will present not only the outcome space representing the phenomenon under investigation, but also descriptions of the various concepts discovered within that outcome space. To facilitate the successful generation of these outcomes, the entire analysis procedure must be guided by the research aim of uncovering variations in human conception of phenomenon (Pong, 2000, Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). In the present study, this took the form of identifying the different ways in which beginning teachers experienced and understood teaching competence.

Having explained the basic purpose of phenomenographic analysis, the following sections will discuss the principles and practices involved in the analytic process.

3.9.1 Principles of data analysis

Johansson (1996) maintains that analysis should begin with the central assumption that there is a limited number of qualitatively different ways in which a given aspect of reality may be conceptualised. He argues further that the uncovered understandings must not be seen as categories used to classify the subject, but moreover as categories that represent the various ways in which a phenomenon

may be conceptualised. Ultimately then, the basic unit of analysis is not the subject, but the conception. Francis (1996) believes that a further principle of phenomenographic analysis demands that the process be conducted in the absence of any preconceived ideas of what might be discovered. The practice of bracketing and thus disregarding any possible preconceptions is vital to the process of data analysis within phenomenography.

3.9.2 Data analysis in practice

As previously outlined, data analysis must begin with a clear picture of the object of the research and this picture must remain focussed throughout the entire process. Furthermore, it is vital that the researcher continues to dwell on the experience of the participant. Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p.22) reinforce this point with a warning that although generalisations across individuals are of value, "it is important that the individual's unique experience is not lost". In achieving this goal, there are two fundamental and interrelated aspects to the analysis of qualitative research data. One aspect is mechanical in nature whilst the other is conceptual. The following section focuses on the mechanical part and in a later section, the conceptual analysis will be discussed.

3.9.2.1 The mechanical analysis of the data

Phenomenographic research generates a large amount of raw data, usually in the form of text. Specifically the research presented here generated 18 transcripts of approximately 500 pages. After a first reading of the transcripts, a conscious decision was made to analyse the data manually so that the researcher could remain as close to the data as possible. Frequent and deep immersion in the reading and rereading of these transcripts proved invaluable in the final 'settling' of uncovered conceptions. This hands-on approach allowed the researcher to feel closer to the data, and in fact closer to the research participants, an important quality in the search for conceptions. The actual mechanical analysis constituted the following steps:

1. Transcripts were read and reread until the researcher felt that she had a clear understanding of what each was saying;

2. During the third or fourth read, the researcher highlighted ‘slabs’ of text with a similar theme. This was achieved with the use of coloured highlighter pens;

3. Once all transcripts were read and highlighted, the highlighted sections were cut and pasted to separate documents, representing each emerging conception;

4. These new documents were then read in their entirety so that the researcher could get a ‘feel’ for the shared understandings that were documented by the beginning teachers. During this combination of processes of sorting and analysing, the researcher sought characteristics that clarified conceptions of the phenomenon and also the ‘structurally significant differences’ that would allow relationships among the categories to be specified (Bruce, 1992);

5. Once the researcher felt satisfied that she was being as faithful as possible to the experiences of the research participants, she allocated an appropriate label to each document. These labels became the recognised conceptions, and the associated text then provided quotations that represented each conception. For the purpose of identification, each quotation was allocated a gender and transcript number, for example [Interview 11, Female];

6. From this stage forward, individual transcripts were no longer a part of the analysis process. Instead, the new documents containing data representing each conception, were used as points of reference, thus creating the ‘pool’ of data that is the cornerstone of phenomenographic research.

In this section, an attempt had been made to illuminate the importance of managing and remaining close to the large pool of data generated in a phenomenographic investigation. It was argued that the hands-on mechanical approach chosen here, was most appropriate for this researcher as it enabled her to remain as close as possible to the data. The amount of data was not considered to be too much for the researcher to handle and at all times mechanical access was available to the

complete range of variation so that conceptual analysis was possible. Although it has been stated previously that the mechanical and conceptual aspects of analysis are interwoven, it should be disclosed that the mechanical aspect plays a much less important role when compared to the conceptual analysis, and it is this conceptual analysis that forms the basis of the following section.

3.9.2.2 The conceptual analysis of the data

The most challenging aspect of phenomenographic research is the conceptual part of data analysis that includes identification of meaningful segments of data, organisation of these segments into categories and finally construction of an outcome space that describes the relationship among the categories of description. The previous section revealed the large volume of qualitative data gathered from the phenomenographic interview process. It also outlined how the mechanical analysis assisted with the deconstruction of the data into chunks that were manageable for assimilation by the human mind. Tesch (1987, p.1) argues that this process is not one of mere random division, but involves "skilled perception and artful transformation by the researcher". She outlines a number of elements that represent the essence of successful qualitative data reduction and it is this combination of elements that provides an overview of the process adopted in this study.

- the researcher captures what is most important, most prevalent, most essential in the thousands of words dealing with the object of investigation;
- the data become distilled to their essentials rather than simply being diminished in volume;
- the process is methodical, systematic and goal-oriented;
- the research outcomes lead to a result that others can accept as representing the data (Tesch, 1987, p.1).

Arguments in the current chapter have highlighted the strengths of phenomenography when applied to research of a qualitative nature. Researchers

such as Hasselgren (1996) however believe that a weakness of many phenomenographic studies is the failure to illuminate clearly how the uncovered conceptions are derived. He argues that it is insufficient to simply transcribe the interviews, read and reread these and then assume the emergence of categories of description and conceptions. According to Hasselgren (1996) what is required of researchers is a detailed account of the process of gathering and analysing the data, stating possible considerations behind the interview questions and reflection on the ascribed meaning of the transcribed text. In this manner, the researcher takes into account how the conceptions take form as the interview protocols and transcripts are created.

In the light of these concerns, the next part of this section will examine closely the conceptual analysis of the data used in the present study. This examination will utilise the guidelines of Svensson and Theman (1983) whose research on conceptions of political power formed the basis for an examination of the relations among the categories of description developed and the data analysed. Their associated report deals with a singular interview protocol, but focuses on an in-depth investigation of the processes utilized to describe faithfully, the interviewee's conceptions of political power. Using the Svensson and Theman (1983) example, the present section confines itself to a single interview in an attempt to highlight the processes of analysis used in this study. The section will also illustrate how the categories of description were formed and refined. It should be noted that although only presenting a 'snapshot' of the total analysis process, the following discussion provides insight into how the analysis was undertaken.

In the sections to follow, three interview excerpts have been selected from one interview to assist in an explanation of how the conceptual analysis of data was undertaken in this study. Excerpts are taken verbatim and within each, numbered segments are framed and shaded for easy reference. For example the following reference: "Fig. 3.1: Int. except 1:1" refers to Figure 3.1, Interview excerpt 1 and relates to the first framed segment that begins with the words: "A competent beginning teacher means…". A page number in each excerpt conveys the page number of the interview transcript. The natural sequence of the interview is retained and presented to best convey the actual context of the conversation. Furthermore, these extended interview excerpts indicate the manner in which the

interviewer uses probing questions to explore particular avenues of inquiry. In some cases these longer excerpts illustrate how beginning teachers may conceive of competence in more than one way.

In the first excerpt (see Fig 3.1: Int. excerpt 1:1), the beginning teacher responds to the opening question with a general statement that competence is demonstrated when beginning teachers are able to perform the duties of a 'normal' classroom teacher in a responsible manner. This responsibility is expressed in terms of 'looking after' the children and being able to 'instruct' them. From this starting point, the beginnings of a conception of competence (as pedagogical knowledge) are gleaned from the data. From this point, the researcher needs to scan the rest of the transcript and other transcripts with the intention of seeking additional references to confirm or deny that effective pedagogy is seen by beginning teachers as important to beginning teacher competence.

What does it mean to be a competent beginning teacher?

A competent beginning teacher means that you're able to perform the duties of a class, or a normal classroom teacher. It means you're capable of being responsible. Like in my case 26 children. And I have to look after them. Instruct them. Get them to the right place at the right time. Feel that you're able to teach them something. [1]

Like you can, like you know the content. You can break it down. You can teach it to them in a way that they can learn it. Well, basically that you can perform the duties of a normal classroom teacher. [2]

All right. Now do you mind if we look into those aspects?

No. No.

I'm just writing a few things down as we go. So to fulfil the duties of a classroom teacher how do you competently look after those 26 kids? What sort of things do you have to competently look after? [3]

Okay. It's planning You're responsible for them in a way that you can… Like here's an example. Like in my class I have in Year 5 a student that's quite a behaviour problem. He's voicing out. He's kicking. He's hitting. Any annoying children in general. So competent means you can deal with **him** on a, as a child. Or, or like away from the class and look after him at the same time. So being competent means that you can deal with something that's happening but still be like in focus on your class as well [4]

But as a class, sort of, I've got to try and keep him under control. [5]

Pages 1-2

Figure 3.1 Interview excerpt 1

In the second excerpt (see Fig. 3.2: Int. excerpt 2:2), the beginning teacher reinforces her belief in the importance of pedagogy by again describing competence in terms of how her teaching should contribute to student learning outcomes. The scan at this stage is superficial with the researcher getting a 'feel' for the data. As the analysis progresses however, with the researcher interacting with this and other transcripts, refinement of the conceptions is undertaken. For example, early analysis of this data points to a conception relating specifically to classroom pedagogy (see Fig. 3.1: Int. excerpt 1:1 and Fig. 3.2: Int. excerpt 2:2). After further reading and refinement however, it becomes clear that by 'pedagogy' beginning teachers are actually referring to 'pedagogical knowledge' and that the common and overarching theme of this conception is 'knowledge'. As a result of this 'discovery' the transcripts are read again with the aim of uncovering those aspects of knowledge that are considered important by beginning teachers.

You said it's really important to be actually able to teach them something. What do you mean by that? [1]

Well just the whole… Like you might, like at the moment I'm doing, we're doing Australian Explorers. You've sort of got to be able to teach it in a way that they enjoy it and that they actually learn something and that's relevant. Like that's, I think being competent means that you know you realise that it's relevant. You know what to apply to the kids. You know how to teach it in a way that they, that they find interesting. [2]

And its sometimes hard making something like Australian Explorers interesting. But we try and do a variety… Being able to like, because the kids are sort of going " it's a bit boring". But every time we did an explorer, we did a totally different activity with each one. So they sort of got a variety of….

And that sort of catered for different learning styles as well. Like, for some kids, like I've got a fairly low achieving class compared to like the other kids. And so we really have to find those learning styles for the kids. A lot of them have trouble. So we try, try and put as much variety in as we can. [3]

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Figure 3.2 Interview excerpt 2

In addition to the knowledge of pedagogy already noted, another knowledge base relating to content knowledge is now identified. (see Fig. 3.1: Int. excerpt 1:2). Further scanning of the data also reveals knowledge of learning styles as being an important aspect of beginning teacher competence. (see Fig 3.2: Int. excerpt 2:3). When confirmed by additional analysis of this and other transcripts, a decision is made to settle on the wording of this conception as 'a competent beginning teacher has a sound knowledge base for teaching'. This decision is made on the basis that beginning teachers describe competence in terms of what they are required to *know* to be able to teach in a way that facilitates student learning. Rather than nominating a new conception for each of these basis of knowledge, the researcher thinks it more appropriate to emphasize the *knowledge* aspect and then use interview excerpts to demonstrate how beginning teachers value a variety of knowledge types in their descriptions of competent beginning teaching.

The abovementioned process also provides a relevant example of another important aspect of phenomenographic analysis. Once a 'germ' of a conception is identified, the researcher undertakes further reading of the large pool of data in a search for similarities and differences in the words of participating beginning teachers. In the previous example, the term *knowledge* is used by many interviewees and these commonalities are noted and highlighted for further investigation.

It should be noted that the conceptions uncovered by a phenomenographic investigation are not necessarily those identified by all participants. To the contrary, because phenomenographic data is pooled, a conception need only be identified by one beginning teacher for it to become an important aspect of the final outcome space. Indeed, the central focus of phenomenography is to identify all possible ways that a phenomenon is experienced by a selected group. Accordingly, a conception identified by one research participant is treated with equal importance to that identified by a number of participants.

Another aspect of phenomenographic analysis that is essential so that the researcher may remain as faithful as possible to reporting the experience of the research participants, is the ability to gently probe for meaning. Frequently, in the interviews conducted for the present study, interviewees when faced with the question 'What is a competent beginning teacher?' mention lists of attributes that have to be 'unpacked' after prompting by the researcher. For example Figure 3.1: Interview excerpt 1:3 provides an example of a situation where the research participant mentions several lines of thought in her initial response. These thoughts are recorded in writing by the researcher, who at a subsequent time in the interview, is able to 'remind' the participant of her initial ideas and ask for further explanation or clarification.

In fact, clarification of meaning is another important element of the phenomenographic interview that has the potential to influence the outcome of the analysis phase of the investigation. In the research presented here, a conscious decision is made to check for meaning through the use of specific interview questions. Firstly, interviewees are asked 'What is a competent beginning teacher?' and then asked the 'inverse' question 'What is an incompetent beginning teacher?' The participants' authentic experience of the phenomenon under investigation should then be able to be identified due to its presence in both responses.

For example, in Figure 3.1: Interview excerpt 1:4 the interviewee states that 'good planning' is an important element of beginning teacher competence. As a reinforcement of this belief, when asked about incompetence, she states that incompetent beginning teachers are unable to fulfil their obligations in terms of planning (see Fig. 3.3: Int. excerpt 3:2). With each subsequent interview, the researcher has an inbuilt mechanism through which she may remain faithful to the experience of the beginning teacher.

This just might be me flipping the coin over but I'm going to ask it anyway. What you just described to me is your conception of beginning teacher competence. What does it mean to be an incompetent beginning teacher? Now again, I'm not saying what you think of yourself. [1]

Yeah.

I'm talking generally.

An incompetent teacher. I think if you're incompetent, obviously well, for starters, you can't enjoy it.

Okay.

You know, I mean, you've really got to like what you're doing to be good at it.

I think like not being able to do like the basic things. Like plan. Like if you can't that's not being… I think that's incompetent if you can't plan something. Cause I think that's really important. To plan it all out. [2]

Page 2

Figure 3.3 Interview excerpt 3

Phenomenographic researchers should not enter a research project with preconceived notions as to what conceptions may be uncovered. This is quite a difficult task when this researcher was herself once a beginning teacher. As such, the researcher makes every effort to 'bracket' any previous experience of the phenomenon under investigation and not allow these to influence her in any stage of the investigation.

This is particularly pertinent in the interview stage, where the researcher must treat with equal importance, all that is said by the interviewee. It should be noted, that in a further attempt to avoid bias, the researcher did not have knowledge of the conceptions of beginning teacher competence uncovered in Thompson's (1998)

investigation of principals' experience of this phenomenon. She did not read this particular section of the thesis until after settling on the conceptions revealed in the present study.

Before this settling process can occur however, the researcher must be satisfied that she has teased out all of the possible ways that the phenomenon of competence is experienced by beginning teachers. This is a complex and protracted journey, punctuated by several important junctures. One such juncture occurs when the researcher, after superficial scanning of the data, arrives at a 'coarse' analysis. Such interim analysis is possible without deep investigation of all transcripts and enables the researcher to begin to create a 'picture' of how competence is experienced by this group of beginning teachers. At this point, the 'coarse' analysis of the initial responses of the beginning teacher reveals five possible paths of enquiry: 1) competence is pedagogical knowledge/practice; 2) competence is content knowledge; 3) competence is effective planning; 4) competence is behaviour management; and 5) competence is knowledge of students. An overview of this 'coarse' analysis is captured in Table 3.1.

Conceptions of Competence

Pedagogy	Content Knowledge	Planning	Behaviour Management	Knowledge of students
• importance of instructing students. • teach it so they can learn it. • make teaching/ learning interesting for students. • variety of pedagogy is important.	• know content so it can be conveyed to students. • be able to 'break content down'. • know what is relevant to students.	• must be able to plan for individuals as well as the group. • planning is vital to successful teaching. • plan for variety.	• must be able to deal with individual student needs. • must be able to control individuals and the group. • important to maintain focus in the classroom.	• know each student as an individual. • understand and take account of individual student learning styles.

Table 3.1: Overview of ‘coarse’ analysis of interview protocol

As can be seen from the initial scan of the data, descriptions of particular conceptions are not dealt with separately and articulated precisely by beginning teachers. On the contrary, they are interconnected and frequently partly expressed. Svensson and Theman (1983, p.10) capture this notion as follows:

> In a discussion or an unstructured interview many statements are only partly expressed or contain hidden references to something having been mentioned earlier. Every reply is a reply to a question and almost every question emerges from the previous reply. Everything is connected to something else. Still, in reading the protocol one finds that there are different parts dealing with different questions and that some statements seem to address the theme involved more directly than others. This identification of parts and more significant statements is the first step in the analysis and it is deepened and revised through further analysis and interpretation.

The naming of the conception as a category of description is an essential stage in the analysis process, as the selected name must capture the essence of the conception as it is experienced by beginning teachers. Consequently, the conception is not named until the researcher is satisfied that the data has been sufficiently ‘distilled’ to its core meaning and that selected excerpts from transcripts accurately reflect this meaning.

For example, the word *knowledge* is used as the basis of one of the conceptions ‘distilled’ from the large amount of data generated in the present study. Although initial analysis pointed to several separate areas of knowledge that represented beginning teachers’ experience of the phenomenon of competence, final analysis of the complete pool of data enabled the researcher to continue these elements into one conception represented by the statement ‘competent beginning teachers have a sound knowledge base for teaching’.

Throughout the entire stage of analysis, the words of the beginning teachers were the catalyst that started the process. As the analysis moved from a 'coarse' superficial scan, through a series of stages involving closer scrutiny of the data, the researcher became closer to a description of the conception that was the 'best' that could be achieved. Only in the 'writing-up' stage of the research was the final 'fine-tuning' achieved.

The iterative nature of phenomenographic analysis is an essential aspect of the analysis process undertaken in this study. This particular stage of the research involved the movement of the researcher between and among the eighteen interview transcripts by reading and rereading the text. It should be reinforced that the iterative approach to the analysis underpinning phenomenography requires the researcher to work with pooled data, rather than the data reflected in any one interview transcript. The results of the analysis led to descriptions of beginning teachers' conceptions of competence which form the basis of Chapter Four. Chapter Four also describes the approaches to appraisal, as understood by the beginning teachers involved in the present study. An explanation of the relationship between the conceptions of competence is undertaken in Chapter Five. At this stage in the thesis, the literature review is used to help clarify and articulate ideas that emerged in the data analysis presented in the previous chapter.

As stated previously, it must be emphasised that the researcher does not lose sight of the basic assumption of phenomenography and consequently is attempting to describe conceptions of competence through the eyes of a group of beginning teachers, rather than through the eyes of the researcher. Preconceived ideas are 'bracketed' to enable the categories of description of take form from the data and not from the researcher.

In summary, the interview transcripts of the beginning teachers involved in this study were pooled and analysed using the techniques inherent in phenomenographic research. The pool of data was examined to identify the ways in which beginning teachers experienced the phenomenon of competence, and how they understood the approaches to appraisal of their competence. The analysis

continued as the transcripts were read and reread for the purpose of generating categories of description depicting the variation in beginning teachers' conceptions of the phenomenon, and describing beginning teachers' perceptions of how their competence is appraised. The variation between conceptions was then reduced to a limited number of categories that depict the differences in ways of construing the phenomenon. These well-established techniques were used to delimit the range of conceptions that may be held by a target group. The analysis was finalised on the presentation of an exploration of the relations among the recognised conceptions.

3.10 Presentation of the results of the study

This section of the chapter will outline the way in which the results of qualitative research are judged. Sandberg (1995) suggests that in place of the judgement of reliability as interpreted within quantitative research, the qualitative paradigm can employ *interpretive awareness*. Specifically within phenomenography, because researchers cannot escape from their interpretations in the research process, a possible criterion of reliability would be the researcher's interpretive awareness.

> To maintain an interpretive awareness means to acknowledge and explicitly deal with our subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it… researchers with a perspectival subjectivity are more aware of how their own interpretations influence the research process. As they are aware of their interpretations in the research process, these become a strength rather than a threat to reliable results, as is the case with biased subjectivity. (Sandberg, 1995, p.161)

Sandberg (1994) argues that interpretive awareness is more likely to be achieved when the researcher enters into *phenomenological reduction*. In this way the researcher withholds theories and prejudices when interpreting the individual's conceptions under investigation. This process of reduction consists of several steps which act as interpretive guidelines for "how researchers can control and use themselves as interpreters in the research process" (Sandberg, 1995, p.161).

The first step in phenomenological reduction requires that the researcher remain oriented to the phenomenon and how it appears throughout the study. Sandberg (1995) suggests that this orientation is best maintained through careful formulation of the research question. Once clarified, the research question must permeate all aspects of the research process. The second step in the reduction requires that "the researcher is oriented toward describing what constitutes the experience under investigation, rather than attempting to explain why it appears as it does" (Sandberg, 1995, p.162). The researcher must therefore avoid generating descriptions that go past the individuals' experience under investigation.

Sandberg's third step involves the equally important treatment of all aspects of the investigated phenomenon. Through the employment of *horizontalization*, the researcher attempts to treat all elements of the interviewees' responses as of equal significance.

Step four requires a search for the basic meaning structure of the phenomenon under investigation. This *free imaginative variation* means that:

> When a first tentative interpretation of possible variation in the individual's conceptions of their reality is achieved the stability of that interpretation must be checked. This is done by adopting different interpretations when subsequently reading through the data (Sandberg, 1995, p. 162).

This variation process continues until stabilisation of the basic meaning structure of the individuals' conceptions has been achieved.

Using intentionality as a *correlation rule*, step five further aids the explication of the variation in the identified conceptions. This step is achieved in three stages:

a. Identification of what individuals conceive as their reality;
b. Identification of how individuals conceive that reality;
c. Constitution of the conceptions through relating individuals' ways of conceiving to what they conceive.

Although reliability as interpretive awareness pays attention to the researcher's procedures throughout the research process, it cannot guarantee an error-free data analysis. Interpretive awareness can however enable the checks and balances provided through a demonstrative procedure (Giorgi, 1988, p.173).

In addition to the guidelines developed by Sandberg (1995), Entwhistle (1997) offers a series of cautions for those conducting phenomenographic research. He suggests that interview questions are posed in such a way that participants are able to account for their actions from their own frame of reference not from one imposed by the researcher. Entwhistle (1997, p.132) also insists that:

> The categories of description which are the outcomes of the phenomenographic analysis need to be presented with sufficient extracts to delimit the meaning of the category fully, and also to show where appropriate, the contextual relationships which exist.

Furthermore, the summary description of each category needs to draw attention to those features that distinguish it from other categories. Because a single description isolated from interview extracts cannot be fully understood by the reader, the essence of each category can only be conveyed when several extracts are presented. Further discussion of these techniques will be presented in Chapter Four where the results for research presented here, will be revealed.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an extensive discussion of the research methodology selected for the research presented here. After positioning this study within the qualitative paradigm, an argument was made for the selection of phenomenography as the most appropriate method for research whose central aim is to uncover the different ways that a group of individuals conceive of a specific phenomenon. It was stated that the basic principle of phenomenography is an assumption that people view aspects of the world around them in different ways, and it is the recognition of these different ways that is the aim of phenomenographic research.

As such, this principle represents both theoretical and methodological underpinnings of phenomenography.

The chapter continued with a discussion of the major differences between phenomenography and the related, yet significantly different research methodology of phenomenology. After this, a definition was provided for the terminology, central to phenomenography, including experience, awareness, conceptions, phenomena, categories of description and outcome space. The final sections of the chapter revealed the role of the researcher within each phase of the research process and provided details of from whom and how the data was collected. Chapter Three concluded with an overview of the elements involved in the mechanical analysis and the conceptual analysis of the data generated by this study, and an outline of how the results of phenomenographic investigations are presented.

Having 'set the scene' of the processes involved in the research specialisation of phenomenography, the following chapter will outline the findings of the research presented here, through a discussion of the conceptions of competence revealed by the group of beginning teachers involved in this study and the understandings of these teachers in relation to the process of their appraisal.

Chapter Four

Beginning Teacher's Conceptions of Competent Beginning Teachers

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes beginning teacher competence as it is conceived by the beginning teachers who participated in this study. Together, these descriptions represent the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence as it has been uncovered in the research presented here, and are presented as the outcomes of the phenomenographic research strategies reported earlier. As is the emphasis of phenomenography, the categories of description to be presented, relate not to the actual phenomenon, but to what the phenomenon appears to be from the viewpoint of the participating beginning teachers.

This chapter is organised into four parts. The first discusses the way in which the data analysis results are presented. It is informed by the guidelines suggested by Sandberg (1995) who believes that phenomenographic analysis is most *faithfull* when researchers are able to maintain the *interpretive awareness* that enables them to acknowledge and explicitly deal with their subjectivity, rather than to attempt its oversight. The second part of the chapter presents the main findings of the study in the form of the categories of description denoting beginning teachers' conceptions of their own teaching competence. The third section explores the way in which the categories of description can be described in terms of subject-object relationships and the final section presents a discussion of beginning teachers' experiences of the appraisal process.

4.2 Presentation of results of the study

As discussed in Chapter Three, the results of a phenomenographic investigation are presented in an outcome space that contains each of the recognised conceptions, and the relationships between and among these conceptions. Entwhistle (1997)

insists that great care must be taken to establish the categories that most equitably reflect the responses provided by interviewees. This may be achieved through the inclusion of a number of interview extracts that best represent each category. Svensson and Theman (1983) warn however, that purely descriptive presentation of results may give rise to a perception of inadequate analysis. To avoid this pitfall, phenomenographic description must be more than mere narrative. It should have "a more critical edge to the commentary delimiting the category of description" (Thompson, 1997, p. 157). Each category must therefore be described in sufficient detail so that the main character of the conceptions is made explicit.

The results of the analysis of the data in this chapter are reported in the following manner. To illustrate the conceptions of competence identified in this study, extracts of interviews will be used throughout the text of this chapter. On some occasions, both the questions from the interviewer (I) and the responses of the beginning teacher (BT) are stated in an interview segment. To overcome some of the problems outlined previously, the words of the beginning teachers have been woven into the text of the thesis. Finally, where possible, substantial quotations are used to illustrate a category of description. These quotes are indented and written in italics so that they may be differentiated from the main text of the chapter. They are identified with particular beginning teachers and accompanied by a bracketed statement including the interview number and the gender of the interviewee.

In a further attempt to differentiate between the salient features of each conception, two additional means of presenting the results are positioned at the beginning and at the end of each category of description. At the beginning, the subject-object relation that constitutes the conception of competence is represented in diagrammatic form, including the *subject*, *object* and the *character of relation* between the two. The *subject* component of each category of description is 'the beginning teacher' and the *object* is the specific element of competence identified by interviewees. The *character of relation* then, is described in terms of a referential (or meaning) element that delimits *what* beginning teachers conceive as beginning teacher competence.

At the end of each category of description, a selection of quotes that seems representative of the particular conception is presented in table form. This particular strategy is utilized as an efficient way of recapitulating the salient features of the category and at the same time portraying the readiness of the data, through the use of the actual words of the beginning teachers. This table format at the end of each section of the chapter, in effect becomes a concise summary of the section.

4.3 Categories of description

Through deep immersion in and frequent interaction with the data, six distinct conceptions of beginning teacher competence were identified. These conceptions, representing beginning teachers' ways of conceiving teaching competence, are reported here as categories of description. The six categories represent different aspects of beginning teacher competence and "exhaust the variation in the observed data" (Thompson, 1997, p.159). The remainder of this section will focus on a description of each category, supported by evidence from the data. In analysing the data obtained in this study, the following six categories were identified:

- **Beginning teacher competence is being 'well prepared'**: A competent beginning teacher is responsible for thorough planning and classroom organisation.
- **Beginning teacher competence is having a sound 'knowledge base'**: A competent beginning teacher uses a sound knowledge base to facilitate learning.
- **Beginning teacher competence is 'being in control'**: A competent beginning teacher utilizes a range of appropriate behaviour management strategies to control the learning environment.
- **Beginning teacher competence is 'creating networks and partnerships'**: A competent beginning teacher is capable of effective communication with a range of school stakeholders.

- **Beginning teacher competence is 'becoming a professional'**: A competent beginning teacher maintains an image of professionalism.
- **Beginning teacher competence is 'becoming self-aware'**: A competent beginning teacher is aware of himself/herself as both person and teacher.

According to Bruce, (1996) names given to the conceptions create labels for each category of description. She argues that these names enable instant communication of the meanings attributed to the phenomenon by the participants in a study. The following sections of this chapter serve to elaborate the six conceptions represented as categories of description. Each category is illustrated by quotations from participating beginning teachers. These quotations are representative of beginning teachers' comments in general and "are used to describe and delimit the nature of a conception in order to make clear the variation among conceptions" (Thompson, 1997, p.160).

It must not be assumed that the number of statements used to illustrate a conception is indicative of the number of beginning teachers supporting this viewpoint. Interview excerpts illustrate and describe, rather than define the conceptions (Thompson, 1998). As is the practice in the phenomenographic research method, extracts are reproduced verbatim (Inglis, 1996).

4.3.1 Category one: Competence is being 'well prepared'

A competent beginning teacher is well prepared through planning and classroom organisation.

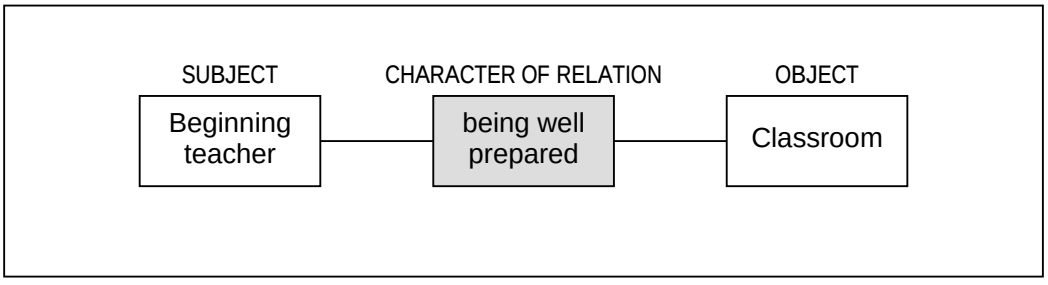

Figure 4.1: The subject-object relationship of Category One

The focus of this conception is the ability of the beginning teacher to create and maintain a classroom characterised by methodical preparation (see Figure 4.1).

> *A competent beginning teacher? First of all being prepared. I think that's the key.* [Interview 8, Female].

According to beginning teachers, preparation refers to both curriculum *planning* and physical and conceptual *organisation* of teaching resources. In terms of *planning* participants in the study refer to planning ahead.

> *Competence is just knowing how to access resources. You know, where am I going to get the textbooks from?* [Interview 8, Female].

The second element of preparation discussed by the beginning teachers involved in this study was that of *organisation*. Competent beginning teachers are able to organise themselves and their classrooms so that learning experiences flow smoothly and without incident.

> *I:* *What does it mean to be a competent beginning teacher?*
> *BT:* *Just to be organised. I mean, if you're not organised, you get yourself into a lot of trouble, I think, with your teaching. Any sort of teaching.* [Interview 2, Male].

Just as the element of competence referred to as *planning* has several subsets, so too does the notion of *organisation*. Beginning teachers conceive of competent organisation as "just using your time wisely" and being able to "keep myself up-to-date". This notion of effective time management can manifest itself in several ways, but generally refers to an ability to deal creatively with the time demands placed upon beginning teachers.

> *You know, just collecting books and having a look at them is time consuming. So what I always do, instead of collecting the whole class' books up at one time, and you know, having 35 books to mark – I take say, six every week.* [Interview 8, Female].

Another aspect of organisation in relation to time management is the beginning teacher's ability to be disciplined enough to avoid procrastination.

> *One of the only ways I seem to get by is if something comes across my desk, to have that done straight away. Because I find as soon as I put it aside, it's a week before I even bother to look at it.* [Interview 12, Female].

A second area of organisation recognised by beginning teachers as vital to the notion of competence is an ability to *prioritise* tasks. Competent beginning teachers should be able to prioritise all aspects of their professional role…

> *… and not just the curriculum aspect. Just with other things that come up as well. Like prioritising things in your day. Like you need to speak to different people. Need to deal with certain issues.* [Interview 11, Female].

The final aspect identified under the umbrella of organisation is that arrangement of the physical classroom setting. This tangible organisation should facilitate maximum student engagement through a well-considered pedagogical "plan of attack".

> *Just by setting up, I guess, an effective learning environment which is supportive of the students in your care. That might mean organisation for your level reading groups or ensuring that you negotiate a set of*

> *classroom rules for behaviour. Arranging class group settings. Organising specific routines for reading and maths etc…* [Interview 14, Male].

The previous section has brought to light a range of elements that beginning teachers consider when conceiving of teaching competence. These elements are grouped under the category relating to being well-prepared for the work of the beginning teacher, but exist within the sub-categories of planning and organisation. Being well-prepared is considered vital if beginning teachers are going to cope with the many and varied expectations placed on them in their new professional role.

An analysis of the data gleaned from this study reveals that beginning teachers place significance on their ability to fully prepare for their professional responsibilities. It is proposed that the concept of this *preparedness* includes a shared focus on *planning* and *organisation*. Close interaction with the data also suggests a conceptual hierarchy in the way beginning teachers conceive of the notion of competent preparedness.

Careful examination of the salient features of this conception reveals a range of behaviours from the relatively straightforward task of organising the physical setting of the classroom, to the sophisticated notion of planning to achieve individual student learning outcomes. It seems that even novice teachers whose focus has traditionally been considered to be their own classroom *survival*, also acknowledge their responsibilities in relation to the needs of the students in their care.

Table 4.1 presents a snapshot of the salient features of this particular conception and provides examples from the interviews.

A competent beginning teacher is well prepared through planning and classroom organisation	
Salient Features of Conception	**Examples from Interviews**
Planning:	
▪ Beginning teachers are able to 'plan ahead'.	*Competence is definitely knowing where you are going. I've planned out my units ahead of time.*
▪ Effective planning involves careful consideration of intended student outcomes.	*When I started to feel more competent was when I felt satisfied with my planning. And I felt satisfied with the achievements of the children.*
▪ Beginning teachers are required to know the curriculum and their students well enough to be able to 'change the plan' if necessary.	*I mean it's (the lesson) not always successful but at least you know you can be flexible. You can change it.*
Organisation:	
▪ The ability to manage time is an important skill for beginning teachers.	*And then you've got the administration stuff. You've got the meetings and trying to fit everything together into a routine, and that's where the organisation comes back on.*
▪ Beginning teachers recognise the need for considered and thoughtful prioritisation of tasks.	*… and not just the curriculum aspect. Just with other things that come up as well. Like prioritising things in your day.* *A really important job that a teacher needs to do is to identify what are the most important things they have to achieve.*
▪ An important part of being an organised teacher is the ability to establish a physical setting that is workable and appropriate.	*Having lots of resources and questions set already so that you're sort of not grabbing at loose ends when you go into a classroom.*

Table 4.1: A competent beginning teacher is well prepared through planning and classroom organisation.

4.3.2 Category two: Competence is sound knowledge base

A competent beginning teacher uses a sound knowledge base to facilitate learning.

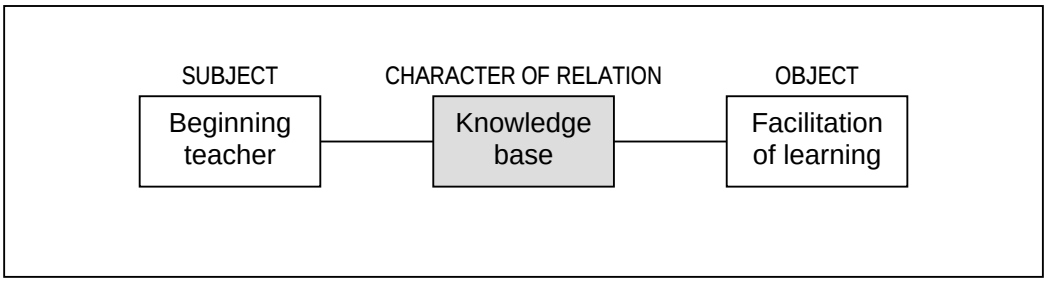

Figure 4.2: The subject-object relationship of Category Two

The overriding theme of this conception is that competent beginning teachers bring with them to the classroom, a knowledge base that will empower them to facilitate student learning.

> *Probably the biggest thing that I thought about the most was just being really sure that I was actually teaching the kids what I was supposed to be teaching them and that they were actually learning it.* [Interview 9, Female].

Because the concept of knowledge is very broad, beginning teachers in their attempts to explain a competent knowledge base, refer to knowledge about:

- the curriculum;
- pedagogical strategies;
- their students.

To describe the conception with clarity, this section will examine individually, each of the forementioned types of knowledge, before drawing them together as one. A thorough knowledge of the *curriculum* is considered essential by beginning teachers if they are to perform their professional duties in a competent manner.

> *Competence in general I suppose is knowing the curriculum that they* [beginning teachers] *have to follow. Understanding what they've got to*

cover. How they've got to cover it. What it means. [Interview 3, Female].

A theme expressed often by beginning teachers is the importance of "understanding and negotiating your way around the curriculum". This can be as simple as having an "awareness of the Key Learning Areas", "knowing where to find the syllabus" or being "able to open up a syllabus and know(ing) where to look". Beginning teachers frequently mention the necessity of having a thorough knowledge of the level of work required by specific schooling year levels.

If you're looking for Maths and you're looking for operations, you need to know that when you go to the sourcebook, find the operations, then there's a whole list of activities there. Otherwise you're stabbing in the dark with what you're supposed to cover. You've got to know what's got to be covered in a year. [Interview 17, Female].

Beginning teachers place importance on their ability to interpret curriculum documentation, enabling them to "understand what the requirements are actually asking you to do".

Once you realise what it [syllabus] *is actually asking of you what it wants you to do, you can get on with the job.* [Interview 2, Male].

Even when explaining the importance of syllabus knowledge, beginning teachers focus on how such knowledge affects the learning outcomes of their students. Evidence from this study suggests that this ability to facilitate learning is a strong indicator of competence.

I: *What does it mean to be competent in this* [curriculum] *area?*

BT: *Actually making sure that you cover what you're expected. Especially for the syllabus, so when they* [students] *go onto the following unit, you've covered what you have to. So the teacher next year doesn't have to go over what you should have done.* [Interview 3, Female].

In addition to curriculum knowledge, beginning teachers also explain competence in terms of the *pedagogy* required to facilitate learning. This pedagogical knowledge enables them to select teaching strategies and learning experiences that engage students in all aspects of a classroom task. Competent pedagogical practice involves "trying to keep the kids interested and keen", using "explicit methods of teaching" and "catering for different learning styles".

> *When you talk about competence or incompetence I always think of the actual teaching part.* [Interview 9, Female].

This 'teaching part' refers to the very practical elements involved in classroom practice. Beginning teachers mention the importance of "getting the work across to the kids in activities or games", "clear instructions", a "functioning classroom" and "using different strategies to get them [students] on task". The notion of maintaining student focus is a common theme throughout the data.

> *I feel I'm competent when I've got kids on task. When they're focussing. When the goals that I've wanted to achieve with a particular lesson are being achieved.* [Interview 5, Female].

Additionally, beginning teachers frequently reinforce the importance of selecting a learning experience that is most appropriate to the context, student group and curriculum area.

> *I have personally found that when we do our handwriting on the board – that's very teacher-directed. And then they* [students] *have a go. But then you've got to do the group things with them for hands-on making puzzles and that sort of thing.* [Interview 4, Female].

An aspect of pedagogical practice mentioned by several participants in this study relates to student assessment. Beginning teachers feel competent when they are able to accurately and meaningfully monitor the progress of their students.

> *I: You mentioned assessment. Is that related to competence?*

BT: *Assessment – oh yes. I found it a real challenge on how to keep a record of all the assessment that I was doing. Because a lot of it is just observing and noting in there how they were going in their, say their maths textbook or whatever, as they were going along. Even if it wasn't a formal test. So, trying to get a mixture of the formal testing and the observation with taking notes and keeping it all together and knowing where it was and then putting it together on a report card.* [Interview 9, Female].

As with *curriculum* knowledge, knowledge of *pedagogy* enhances beginning teachers' understanding of competence only when that knowledge contributes to student learning. Beginning teachers reflect on their pedagogical strategies, not in terms of self-interest, but in terms of the relative contribution of the strategy to the achievement of learning. Beginning teachers mention the sense of competence experienced when they "start to see the fruits of your [their] labour and the sheer exhilaration when "everything comes to fruition".

I: *When do you feel competent?*

BT: *When you see that stuff that we've gone over and we revisit that and re-look at that and they've got it. When you can see that learning has taken place. It's somewhere amongst that thinking. Entered in multiple ways and different settings that its they're able to come out of there. And you think "yeah, we've got it". And that makes you feel like that you've helped. And even when you can see with kids. You can see that light go on. You can see them looking puzzled, they're confused to I can't, I don't want, it's too hard. And then finally you show them in a different way. And you do it in a different way or you talk about it. Show it. And you can see them go "yeah". And they can then either manipulate it or say it. We do a lot of hands on stuff. Lot of concrete information to get it really happening. So and then take it on from that. so we can see progression. You can see it. Yeah. You can see them do it. And that's, it's nice. It's a real kick.* [Interview 5, Female].

The third knowledge base that contributes to the beginning teacher's feeling of competence is that knowledge of *students*. Beginning teachers require a substantial understanding of their students in order to provide appropriate and relevant learning experiences. The combination of these experiences provides students with "the environment they need to have".

> *I:* *Explain what you mean by this knowledge.*
>
> *BT:* *I think it's that knowledge, not necessarily learned at uni. It's knowledge that, you know, in the workplace and it's knowledge -specific knowledge about individual children.* [Interview 6, Female].

Knowledge of individual students is a theme expressed frequently by beginning teachers who value specific knowledge of "children's needs" and "the background of the kids". Also valued is a knowledge of learning styles, so that beginning teachers are able to understand the way in which their students learn most effectively.

> *I:* *Explain this type of knowledge.*
>
> *BT:* *How kids learn best. Different kids do best whether they be visual learners or whether they be people who are kinaesthetic, when they need to go and do something. If one tact doesn't work, trying something totally different. You know, continually trying to explain things in different ways so kids can learn.* [Interview 15, Female].

In addition to knowledge of how students learn best, competent beginning teachers "need to know what the children are capable of and what they should be able to achieve, because otherwise you might have your expectations way too high and the kids can't actually achieve it".

This knowledge also extends to an awareness and recognition of students' learning strengths and weaknesses, as evidenced by the segment of interview transcript that follows:

> *I mean you can ask M* [teacher] *anything about any student in her class and she can tell you exactly what's wrong and pinpoint problems in Maths, English, whatever.* [Interview 17, Female].

A knowledge base for *teaching* is frequently referred to in the education community, but results of this study suggest that for beginning teachers, the emphasis should be placed on the knowledge required to facilitate learning. Evidence presented in this section identifies three discrete, yet interrelated types of knowledge, without which, beginning teachers are unable to feel competent. According to beginning teachers, knowledge of the curriculum, pedagogy and their students enhances competence only in terms of how the knowledge contributes to student learning outcomes. An interesting finding derived from thorough and repeated interaction with the data collected in this study, is the notion that not only do beginning teachers feel competent when their students achieve, they experience excitement and exhilaration when this learning becomes evident.

> *And also I suppose like we were talking things like the other day we did "Our World" first term talking about the continents and all that sort of stuff. And even now like three terms later when a child remembers that Egypt is a country in Africa. And its just you think "gee I taught them that!". That's something, its something stupid like that that sticks in our minds. And the other day Mrs D and I were cleaning out the storeroom and we'd had a glitter fight. Mrs D threw glitter at me so I threw it back at her and one of the girls said "Mrs M, you've got glitter all over you" and I said "Yes, H". I said "Mrs D threw it at me so I threw it back". And all year I've preached to them "two wrongs don't make a right" … and she said "Mrs M don't you know two wrongs don't make a right". I didn't have an answer because I'd taught it to them.* [Interview 18, Female].

The following table provides a summary of the salient features of this conception. Examples from the interviews are also presented.

A competent beginning teacher uses a sound knowledge base to facilitate learning	
Salient Features of Conception	**Examples from Interviews**
Beginning teachers consider that a sound knowledge of the curriculum is a necessary requirement of the profession.	*Competence in general I suppose is the curriculum that they* [beginning teachers] *have to follow. Understanding what they've got to cover. How they've got to cover it. What it means.*
Beginning teachers must be able to apply pedagogical knowledge to the classroom context.	*I like to use explicit methods of teaching.*
It is preferable to design a learning environment where students are interested and actively engaged.	[Competence is] *a classroom where kids are talking about – say in English – they're talking about the novel and they're interacting and they're bouncing ideas off each other. And you know, then we come back together and we have a huge big brainstorm on the board.*
Effective pedagogical practice requires forethought and planning.	*I worked out <u>how</u> I was going to teach that strategy. Whether it be just a way that I thought up or whether it was something I'd read in a book or some sort of method. Whether it be hands on, or talking to them…*
Competent beginning teachers get to know their students so that appropriate learning experiences may be designed.	*I change the physical environment of the classroom purely because of the understanding that I have – in particular with the ASD kids that don't deal with change well.*
Knowledge of individual learning styles is important.	*We must know the kids and what we think is their preferred learning style.*
Knowledge regarding the curriculum, pedagogical practice and individual students is most valuable in terms of how it contributes to student learning.	*Being competent is that there's a level of satisfaction with what I'm able to offer following the guidelines I've been given and the feeling that yeah – you have done a good job. You have fulfilled some of the criteria and the kids have actually learned something.*

Table 4.2: A competent beginning teacher has a sound knowledge base to facilitate learning.

4.3.3 Category three: Competence is being in control

A competent beginning teacher utilises a range of appropriate behaviour management strategies to control the learning environment.

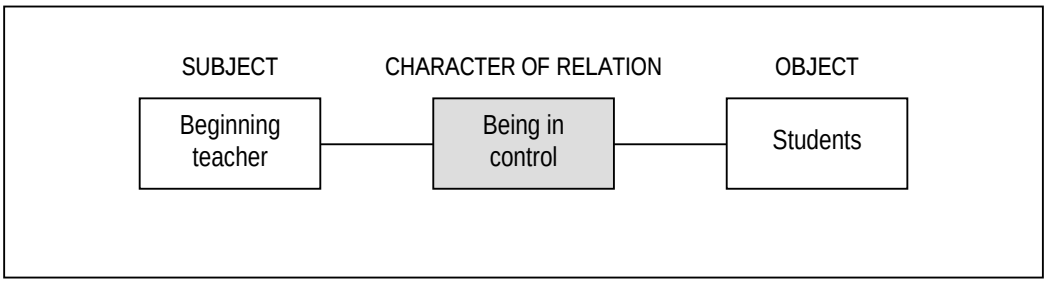

Figure 4.3: The subject-object relationship of Category Three

> *I: What is it about beginning teachers that makes them competent?*
>
> *BT: They have to be competent in the behaviour of their class – the children in their class … having strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. Being able to handle whole class situations, group situations and of course, individual behaviour problems.* [Interview 3, Female].

This interview extract represents the essence of conception three. To consider themselves competent, beginning teachers must be able to manage the behaviour of their students. In this context, behaviour management refers to the teacher's ability to *control* the behaviour of the students so that an orderly learning environment can be developed and maintained. Beginning teachers agree that behaviour management issues will occupy a regular part of classroom routine because "rarely do you get one of them [students] through the day without misbehaving somewhere – so rarely do you have a day where you're not dealing with behaviour". Because behaviour problems arise on a regular basis, beginning teachers consider knowledge and skill in this area to be vital to their conception of competent teaching.

The participants in this study consider that "behaviour management is a vital key part of working with children". It can be the difference between feelings of success and failure in terms of how these teachers conceive of their professional competence.

> *If you see your behaviour management up right it can be … It's the difference between a good year in the classroom and a bad year in the classroom. If you set down your expectations. Set down your rules.* [Interview 15, Female].

The notion of guidelines, expectations and rules suggests that beginning teachers value the preventative elements of a behaviour management plan. Preventative strategies make it more likely that the classroom will remain "organised" and "running smoothly".

> *You've got to sort of set those ground rules and have that set so that you can get through the rest of the year.* [Interview 10, Female].

Beginning teachers prefer a management plan that is highly structured and conveyed to students early in the school year.

> *And that bit of knowledge that I've learned is that those guidelines are just so important for those kids. It's that structured – very structured.* [Interview 7, Male].

If a classroom is to be managed in an efficient manner, a range of strategies must be employed to control behavioural aspects of the environment. One beginning teacher refers to the use of "different models in different classrooms" and the need for an ability to make relevant selections from a "bank" of behaviour management strategies that best suit the particular situation or problem.

> *Each person's individual. What works for one class, won't work for another class. What works for one child, won't work for another child. so you can't really learn it. You've got the strategies to reflect upon, but yeah, one child might ignore a reward system where another child might be totally changed by that.* [Interview 3, Female].

Within this range of behaviour management strategies, beginning teachers recognise the importance of maintaining control, even if this requires them to raise their voice. According to them however, overuse of a loud voice should not be the only behaviour management tool in the toolkit.

> *You have to raise your voice sometimes. I mean it's just a given. But if you were doing it every ten seconds, the kids are going to respond to that. And obviously, you know the situation might increase and get worse and worse and worse. Until where you're a mess and the kids aren't enjoying school. And you know, the classroom becomes a battle zone instead of a learning zone.* [Interview 8, Female].

This belief is further reinforced by a beginning teacher who reflects:

> *If you're standing there and they're* [students] *all standing around in a big heap and you're, you as the teacher are standing there shouting over the top of them. That's not helping at all. You have to find other ways. And lots of times it's visual things. Because they can't hear you half the time that they're all making a row. You're wasting your time. You might as well, I don't know, stand there and say nothing. Don't know. I sort of find if there's a group of kids and you walk into them like and they're all making noise and then you put your hand like right up high. Put your hands on your head, they think "oh". This one*

nudges that one, and that one nudges… And it might take a couple of seconds but eventually… [Interview 16, Female].

Linked closely to the notion that competence may be judged by the range of behaviour management strategies possessed by beginning teachers, is the belief that classroom control is enhanced when a balance of strategies is employed. Beginning teachers are able to strike this balance when they develop an intuitive sense of what level of control is required. Such intuition can only be drawn upon when teachers have a thorough knowledge of their students and the learning environment.

Well, I think once they are able to find the balance of – you know, I guess not being too strict but not being too light. You know, knowing what works, what doesn't work, how much, I guess, flexibility to give. You know when to pull the reins in, when to let them out a little bit. You know, just being able to know the balance. And I mean one of the things too that you know, I found pretty quickly was, you can't do everything in every class. I mean, there are some classes that I have that I can be very flexible with activities and the behaviour with. And yet there are others that I must be very strict with, on my toes the whole time with them. You know, I can't sort of relax as much with those sorts of grades. [Interview 2, Male].

An interesting aspect of beginning teachers' understanding of classroom control is the notion that as relatively novice teachers, they cannot be completely competent in this area. The first year of teaching is characterised by a *trial and error* system of behaviour management where the teacher experiments with systems and strategies until a satisfactory plan is developed.

> *When you get your own class - like I felt it was really hard to try behaviour management. Like that was… Some people are really, really good at it. Got different techniques. I am still trying things. Like even after a year. Trying like with the littlies the clapping or the hands on heads, or the rewards. And then I've just done, like the last two weeks, after I'd been sick I sort of got back and everything's out of whack. And they're misbehaving again. But I find if I'm organised and they're busy, then they're usually really well behaved. I've just started a wall a big chart to try that. That's only sort of been up for a week. Yeah, I just keep trying new things. And started to really come down and send them outside. Every time they do something. They're just so quick. Out you go. Come back in. Just to try and, you know, I keep trying.* [Interview 4, Female].

Beginning teachers comment on the highly individual nature of competent behaviour management. They understand that these skills cannot be learned from a book, nor reproduced from the observation of more experienced teachers. The management of classroom behaviour is "something that you've got to sort of work out for yourself. You try something and if it doesn't work, don't scrap it altogether. It may be it just won't work for that person [student]". A behaviour management plan must therefore reflect the individual characteristics and needs of both students and teacher.

> *In my classroom there is quite often a bit of chatter. But another teacher could walk in there and think that would be intolerable. In mine, there is quite often a bit of chattering and a lot of interaction and things like that. And I think that's good. For me. But for another teacher that might be, you know, this is not acceptable. And, we need to come down on it. So you need to determine that what is okay for you.*

> *The level of you know, behaviours okay. Is acceptable. And then feel happy about it and be able to justify it.* [Interview 7, Male].

An interesting and important link between conceptions two and three, is their shared focus on the importance of student learning. Just as conception two argues that the knowledge base of the beginning teacher is vital to the achievement of learning outcomes, conception three highlights the contribution of behaviour management to student achievement.

> *But I think you need to have control of the situation otherwise they're not going to learn. I mean kids are kidding them. If you're not in control and not sort of, well how can I say it, call it control. But if you're not in control of the classroom situation, the kids are just going to go out. They're going to talk about anything and they're not going to be learning your subject. And they're not going to be gaining experiences*. [Interview 8, Female].

Beginning teachers refer to the importance of classroom control, not only in terms of their own needs, but in terms of the learning needs of their students. A classroom characterised by disorder and lack of control cannot provide an environment where learning is maximised and all members of the classroom community experience satisfaction and success.

> *Once you start to get behaviour management under wraps, then its* [teaching] *much more tolerable – much more enjoyable. And you can work more towards learning.* [Interview 7, Male].

Once again it seems that beginning teachers, far from exhibiting a purely self-serving attitude to their first year of professional engagement, equate competence with their ability to facilitate student learning. The table that follows represents a

summary of the salient features of conception three and provides interview excerpts as examples of these features.

A competent beginning teacher utilises a range of behaviour management strategies to control the learning environment.	
Salient Features of Conception	**Examples from Interviews**
Beginning teachers consider effective behaviour management to be an essential part of their professional responsibilities.	*A very big part of being a teacher is being able to manage problems – behaviour problems that occur.*
Effective management of behaviour enables the maintenance of an orderly classroom.	*People who have difficulty managing kids in the classroom – they have disorganised, rowdy classrooms – like lots of behaviour problems coming from those classrooms.*
Beginning teachers must possess a range of behaviour management strategies.	*They have to be competent in the behaviour of their class – the children in their class… having strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. Being able to handle whole class situations, group situations and of course individual behaviour problems.*
When teachers accept responsibility of their first class, they do not know everything about behaviour management. This knowledge builds with experience.	*I'd probably say the biggest that thing I know I'm a lot more competent now than this time last year is with behaviour management. I feel a lot more confident as well as competent and we've got some children in here that have been trial and error – a lot of the boys and like D and I have been trying different things throughout the year and we just feel so much more confident now with behaviour management.*
A functional classroom must include the use of a balance of behaviour management strategies.	*Well I think once they* [beginning teachers] *are able to find a balance – you know – I guess, not being too strict, but not being too light.*

Table 4.3: A competent beginning teacher utilises a range of behaviour management strategies to control the learning environment.

4.3.4 Category four: Competence is creating networks and partnerships

A competent beginning teacher is capable of effective communication with a range of school stakeholders.

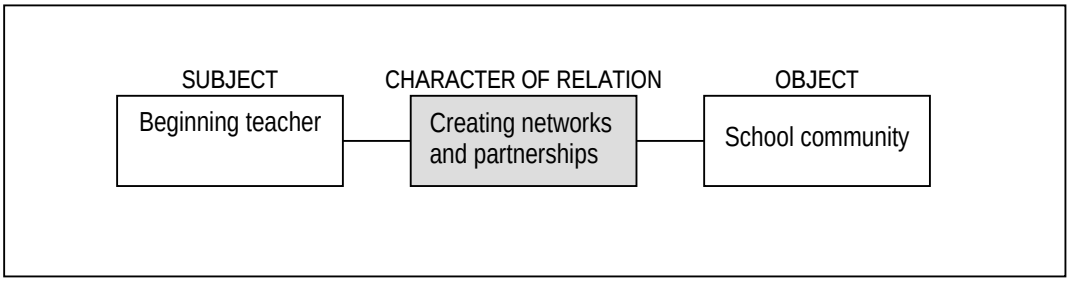

Figure 4.4: The subject-object relationship of Category Four.

The focus of this conception is the ability of the beginning teacher to develop and maintain open and effective communication with a range of stakeholders within the education context. Beginning teacher competence means "being able to communicate with all people. Communication is vital". In this context communication is not limited to verbal exchanges within the classroom. It refers to a range of verbal and non-verbal exchanges between beginning teachers and their students, parents, other teachers and ancillary staff within the school and the teaching staff of other schools.

Beginning teachers share a belief that their teaching competence is linked closely with their ability to communicate with other teachers on staff.

> *I think there's just so much more to it than just teaching kids. You have to be able to relate to the other staff. You have to communicate really well.* [Interview 11, Female].

This communication is largely undertaken as means of seeking support or assistance in their new role. Beginning teachers build rapport with fellow teachers

so that they may share ideas and perhaps use the more experienced teacher as a "sounding board".

> *Well, relationships within the school with other teachers. You know, myself and P who is the maths teacher at school – we tend to help each other out a lot. Like with ideas and with, you know, just with the running of things… Just networking with each other.* [Interview 2, Male].

Beginning teachers also make special mention of the importance of maintaining communication with the principal.

> *I:* *You mentioned that you needed to be a competent communicator. Who do you need to communicate with?*
> *BT:* *But yeah – communication is important – definitely with the principal.*

Being new to the profession, beginning teachers look to the principal for guidance and support. They also seek to maintain communication with ancillary staff within the school. Once again, this communication enables beginning teachers to feel comfortable in seeking assistance from "the admin person, of course, and your aides".

> *I communicate well with the people that I work more closely with, which is my aide in preschool. And while I'm in Year 1, I'm doing .5 with another teacher. So I've been communicating also a lot with her. People that I feel confident enough to approach.* [Interview 13, Female].

In seeking assistance with their new professional responsibilities, beginning teachers also establish communication with teachers outside of their own school. They refer to such communication as *networking* and once again, the networks are established, largely to provide support and guidance to the beginning teacher.

> *Being able to establish relationships. More so outside to other sort of teachers and other schools who can sort of, you know, help you, particularly in grounding. Because I know when I did arrive I was put into English. I'd never taught English before as a subject. We had no English teachers in the secondary department. Well, we didn't at that point. So, you know, I sort of talked to a teacher from a past school that I was at, doing an experience* [prac teaching] *at, and she helped me a lot. Found out a lot of information, introduced me to other people. You know, that were able to help me with resourcing and that sort of thing.* [Interview 2, Male].

When faced with new and perhaps problematic classroom situations, beginning teachers feel comfortable "ringing up mentors" they have worked with during an internship or practice teaching situation undertaken as part of their undergraduate degree program.

According to beginning teachers an important focus of their communication skills, and one which links directly with their feeling of competence, is the ability to build rapport with the parents of their students.

> *You know, that's what we're doing. Introduce yourself as a beginning teacher. Help them get to know you, I suppose. And it depends on the relationship that you have. If you talk to the parents, parents talk back to you.* [Interview 1, Male].

The reason given for the importance of this communication is that beginning teachers feel that to fully understand each student, they must first seek knowledge of the student's family and home environment.

> *I:* *You mentioned parents – do you communicate with them?*
>
> *BT:* *Yeah, yeah. And even for example last time we had a parent/teacher interview and now that I know a lot of the parents of* ***this*** *class and who their parents are, the children, you can relate or understand where the child comes from or*

> *their experiences out of the school. And, yeah, you know the parents who are really concerned about their kids.* [Interview 3, Female].

Beginning teachers admit that communication with people is not one-way. Just as they seek information from parents, so too do they have a responsibility to provide parents with regular, accurate updates on general classroom events and the progress of the children within the class. To ensure that this communication is developed and maintained, beginning teachers utilise a range of techniques including verbal communication, written communication and other tangible means of conveying an intended message.

A means of developing rapport with parents is through regular *verbal communication*. Competent beginning teachers take the time to interact with the parents they have encouraged to enter their classroom. These teachers agree that "being able to communicate with parents is **really** important" and they ensure that parents feel comfortable in these interactions.

> *Yeah, with parents there's a lot of communication – you have a lot of parents who just come into the room and talk to you all the time and ask questions.* [Interview 3, Female].

Beginning teachers encourage parental involvement in classroom activities and also make themselves available "for a chat".

> *I think having the little grades every afternoon is almost like a parent/teacher interview. And that's something that I've really… Last year I was really, really nice and we'd chat and be here till 4.00 o'clock chatting to parents.* [Interview 4, Female].

In addition to the informal 'chat', beginning teachers also instigate verbal communication with parents with the aim of eliciting specific information. Specifically, beginning teachers seek feedback from parents regarding the impact

on the student, of the work performed by the teacher. Beginning teachers want to know if their teaching is having an impact on their students.

> *I feel competent as a teacher when I get that feedback from parents. When I talk to them over IEP* [individual education program] *meetings or through the communication book if that's the case. However, we have our communication and they're able to say they've seen these changes either in behaviour or whether they see these changes in academic learning. Yeah, that makes me feel like I'm doing my job to a good standard.* [Interview 4, Female].

Just as beginning teachers seek student-related information from parents, so too do they seek to contribute to this process through shared communication. Beginning teachers feel responsible for supplying to parents, feedback regarding the progress of the student.

> *I suppose parents give their kids to the school to educate. And I think it would be awful if they thought "oh, I don't know if they're a very good teacher" or whatever. I think, well your own work should be really up to scratch and you've got to communicate that you're getting somewhere with their child.* [Interview 11, Female].

Although communication with parents can be verbal, beginning teachers also judge their competence in terms of their ability to provide *written communication* to parents. This communication can take the form of general newsletters that provide information about classroom issues or events.

> *And then there's newsletters, I'd communicate with them about what we're doing in the classroom. And why we're doing it. And informing those parents about why, you know, by updating them. For example, in addition, you know in subtraction how you borrow something and pay back lots of things*. [Interview 7, Male].

Competent beginning teachers also take the time to provide to parents relevant details regarding the progress of students. This interaction may take many forms, but is designed to keep parents informed. Written communication of this type may take the form of a formal report or a more informal letter or entry in a daily communication book.

> *And so that was part of it. And she realised that, you know, how I maintained communication. Every week I sent home at the back of their homework books, I'd write notes about each individual child. So each parent gets individual notations about their child every week.* [Interview 7, Male].

An interesting form of communication highlighted by the participants in this study is one that can not be neatly defined as either *verbal* or *written*. In this context the communication mode may best be termed *visual*. Beginning teachers are able to communicate their competence to parents through the maintenance of an interesting and visually stimulating learning environment. To these teachers, competence is not only judged on what they *do*, but also how they *appear*.

> *And I mean like, last year I was here every weekend probably you know both days. Just to, cause I was really fanatical about the classroom looking good. Like it's a bit like it was a showroom. Something like that was how I showed that I was competent with the parents. They'd come in and every activity that they, the kids had done I'd have little headings for and the work was up. And next term I'm going to do that again! But this terms been a bit of a shocker. But that was sort of like when the parents came in they even if they hadn't seen me teaching. "Oh, it looks really, really good. She obviously knows what she's doing".* [Interview 4, Female].

Before moving on from a discussion involving communication with parents, it must be noted that beginning teachers judge their competence in terms of their ability to deal with parents without becoming intimidated. With every respect to the powerful position of the parent, beginning teachers feel that they must maintain a belief in their own abilities and decisions, which should be communicated to parents in a professional manner.

> *Parents they're, you know, they're keen. So you've got their kids. But no, you definitely have to be able to talk to them. Like I obviously I don't show that I'm a brave woman but I just sort of think, you know. I guess, just being able to stand your ground, too. Sometimes, too. If they come up demanding certain things that just won't happen. And you've sort of got to know your rights I think, too is important too.* [Interview 10, Female].

When discussing the importance of effective communication skills, beginning teachers equate competence with the ability to communicate with their students. Teacher-student interaction is paramount in a functional learning environment.

> *I:* *You mentioned communication. What do you mean by that?*
>
> *BT:* *Being able to talk to them. I think that's really important. You know, talk to them on a level and like be there for them. Like, they might come up and tell you the silliest thing. You sort of think "why did they come up and tell it?" But at least you've given them the time as well. I think that they're probably sort of the basic things that I think really a teacher needs to have.* [Interview 12, Female].

It should be noted that this communication does not have to occur within the classroom. Beginning teachers also recognise the power of informal interaction with their students in contexts ranging from playground duty or sports training, to

school camp or concert practice. Some beginning teachers even go so far as to suggest that they "get to know kids better" in an informal setting.

> *You always get to know kids better if, you know, out of school, classroom settings. Like, you know, in touch football teams or whatever. Outside school. You just, you tend to get a better knowledge of them. You know, their parents might be coming down so you sort of get a better knowledge of them*. [Interview 17, Female].

The notion of informal communication with students is highly valued by beginning teachers who believe that competent teachers develop a bond with their students through shared interest and understanding. They maintain that to *teach* a child, one must first *know* the child and this is best achieved through frequent and active communication.

> *If you've got nothing to do at lunch time just go down and read a book underneath a tree so that the kids know that you're interested in what they're doing and stuff like that. And just basically making sure you have a chat to each child every day on a personal level of, you know, their interests and stuff and that sort of thing. And extracurricular activities as well like we know that when they're really interested in them as people*. [Interview 18, Female].

This section has revealed the value of effective communication skills for beginning teachers who equate competence with their ability to share information with students, teachers, parents and other school personnel. Beginning teachers use a range of communication styles to gather the information required to operate as competent professional educators.

The following table presents a summary of the salient features of this conception and provides examples from the interviews.

A competent beginning teacher creates networks and partnerships with a range of school stakeholders.	
Salient Features of Conception	**Examples from Interviews**
The ability to communicate is an essential part of beginning teacher competence.	*Communication's a big thing.* *Communication is vital.*
Beginning teachers should communicate with school personnel.	*You have to relate to other staff. You have to communicate really well.* *But yeah – communication is important – definitely with the principal.*
Being teachers should develop networks with colleagues, both within and outside of their teaching context.	[Competence is] *being able to establish relationships. More so outside to other sort of teachers and other schools, who can sort of, you know, help you.*
Competent beginning teachers develop and maintain open communication with parents.	*Yeah, with parents there is a lot of, you have a lot of parents who just come into the room and talk to you all the time and ask questions.*
Communication with parents can be: ▪ verbal ▪ written ▪ visual	*So parents, yeah. We meet six monthly, formally to do our IEP's. And they get copies. They have input in that. And we're here if they want to talk about stuff. But then I would talk to every parent at least, at best four times a week.* *And so that was part of it. And she realised that, you know how I maintained communication. Every week I sent home at the back of their homework books, I'd write notes about each individual child. So each parent gets individual notation about their child every week*
For beginning teachers to feel competent in their professional duties, they must establish a substantial level of communication with each student.	*Being able to talk to them* [students]. *I think that's really important. Like they might come up and tell you the silliest thing. You sort of think "why did they come up and tell it?" But at least you've given them the time as well. I think that they're probably sort of the basic things that I think really a teacher needs to have.*

Table 4.4: A competent beginning teacher creates networks and partnerships with a range of school stakeholders

4.3.5 Category five: Competence is becoming a professional

A competent beginning teacher maintains an image of professionalism.

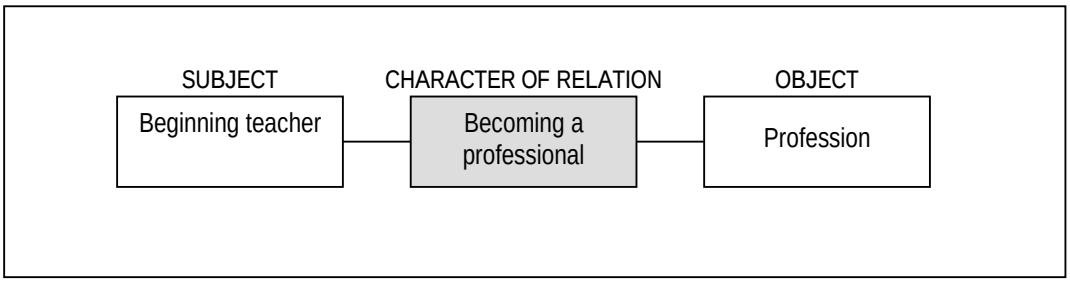

Figure 4.5: The subject-object relationship of Category Five.

The focus of this conception is the ability of the beginning teacher to present to the eduction community, an image of confidence and professionalism.

> *I think it* [competence] *means that you can have a bit of a presence so it looks like you know what you're doing.* [Interview 4 Female].

For beginning teachers, this *image/presence* may be displayed in a number of ways including the conveyance of:

- confidence;
- enthusiasm;
- involvement;
- professionalism.

Despite having just entered the profession, beginning teachers feel that their competence in no small way is dependent upon confidence in their own abilities.

> *You've got to have confidence within yourself to know that I can do this. I can do this with kids. You know, it's that responsibility. You know, they are relying on me too. To the parents and the Principal, other teachers all that.* [Interview 7, Male].

This confidence generally refers to the beginning teachers' belief in themselves and their ability to fulfil the necessary requirements of the job. Beginning teachers recognise the importance of the profession that they have entered and acknowledge that to undertake their responsibilities successfully they must have confidence in themselves.

> *I:* *What does competence mean to you?*
>
> *BT:* *I think to feel confident that you come into the classroom and do the job that you've been trained to do.* [Interview 15, Female].

Although acknowledging the importance of confidence, beginning teachers warn that they must not allow themselves to become overconfident. Realistic understanding of their capabilities will ensure that they operate within the boundaries of their competence.

> *If a teacher's not confident, I think they're really going to struggle. I really think confidence – but not overconfidence by any means. That's silly.* [Interview 12, Female].

Beginning teachers have definite views on the professional areas about which they should be confident in their abilities. These areas generally refer to the basic elements involved in the teaching profession.

> *And to start off teaching and to feel confident that you can plan. You can assess appropriately. You know how… you know where the sourcebooks are, the syllabus documents are. You know what they are. You know how to plan from them. You know what you are expected to teach. You know how to find information. Those kinds of things. Yeah, you know how to go about planning work for a class for a year and teaching that work.* [Interview 15, Female].

In addition to conveying confidence, beginning teachers believe that their competence is also linked to a display of *enthusiasm* for the profession. The participants in this study maintain that competent beginning teachers must convey enjoyment of and enthusiasm for the content of their lessons. Such enthusiasm is considered vital and provides a positive example for students.

> *But you know, sort of, if you're going to be teaching history like I teach, actually **like** teaching history and **enjoy** history so your enthusiasm can rub off on the students!* [Interview 8, Female].

Closely related to the notion of beginning teachers' enthusiasm, is their willingness to become involved in all aspects of school life. Beginning teachers link their feelings of competence to an attitude that compels their total *involvement* in the school community to which they belong. The participants in this study cited school involvement as including such activities as "getting involved in the community", "taking kids for sport" and "debating". Such involvement provides evidence of beginning teachers' willingness to fully immerse themselves in their profession.

> *So that's a competency thing. Being able to be involved in just the general school… Not to be so busy trying to run your program but realising that part of the school is not only what happened in the classroom but all the little linkages that happen along the way. And being able to find for yourself a role somewhere in the bigger scheme of things.* [Interview 16, Female].

Beginning teachers are aware that school involvement includes many more elements than can be demonstrated in the classroom. Complete professional involvement includes participation in a full range of extracurricular activities so that teachers can "get to know" their students more fully.

> *I: What is competence?*

> *BT: Getting involved I think, in lots of extracurricular activities. That you actually get to know your students on a level beyond the classroom.* [Interview 8, Female].

An overwhelming element of this conception that emerged through repeated interaction with the data, is the notion that to consider themselves competent, beginning teachers must demonstrate a high standard of professional behaviour. This *professionalism* manifests itself in many ways including a high standard of conduct, responsibility, attitude and work ethic.

> *I think you've got to present yourself in a certain way if you're professional. You know, people come up and see you at school and parents come up. You've got to seem – you like them to think you are a professional. You know what you're doing.* [Interview 10, Female].

Competent beginning teachers conduct themselves in specific ways that place them in a positive light in the eyes of community members.

> *Well I feel that professionalism is, comes in a number of forms. For example, the way you conduct yourself. With the behaviour you exhibit within the community. You know, for example parents. But not just parents. But in the way that you're dealing with people outside the school environment. Because, especially in small communities, you're very much a representative of the school in and outside of hours.* [Interview 7, Male].

Professional conduct is not limited to what happens within the boundaries of the school. Beginning teachers display professional competence when they are aware of the impact of their conduct in the community beyond school.

> *Like I know what I mean about professionalism, I've got to think when I'm out now. Like I went out bowling yesterday and I wonder how many kids will be at bowling. And then I think… And then I've got my boyfriend, too. And I make sure, you know, you've got to act, I think in*

a certain way, too. But like if people do see you out they think "oh my God" sort of thing. Is that what they're like? In a way it's a bit unfair that you've got to take your sort of… Because you put on a bit of an act at school, I think, with the kids and you sort of take that sort of outside your workplace as well. But that's sort of what you choose to do when you become a teacher. [Interview 10, Female].

Beginning teachers also display competence through a professional attitude to their teaching responsibilities. One such attitude is that which compels these teachers to strive for continual improvement in their relationships with their students.

For example, the attitudes, work ethic and professionalism. I think they interweave with each other. But attitudes would be, for example, a positive attitude towards children. One which is supportive. Uplifting. An attitude which is, you know, a willingness to strive for the, for continued better performance. You know, continue to strive to improve. [Interview 7, Male].

Another attitude is more closely related to the pedagogical aspects of the teaching profession. Competent beginning teachers, cognisant of their relative inexperience, gratefully accept and act on feedback from other school personnel.

I: *What do you mean by 'attitude'?*

BT: *Just the way they approach tasks and the way they accept feedback or the way they take feedback on board. I guess if they apply that feedback back to their classrooms. I guess attitude would be a characteristic of a competent teacher.* [Interview 14, Male].

A further way that beginning teachers can display a professional attitude is through the acceptance of additional responsibilities. Along with their pedagogical duties, competent beginning teachers readily accept the 'extra' roles that are expected of teachers. This includes "participating in school functions" and "involvement in committees".

I guess, especially with me being put in a number of situations that, you know, I didn't really encounter on internship or pracs. You know like suddenly being told "oh well, you're going to help basically organise the swimming carnival". [Interview 2, Male].

Competent beginning teachers display professionalism through a "good work ethic". They realise that as newcomers to the profession, they will be required to work hard to achieve the goals set by themselves and by their employing organisation.

A good work ethic. What happens is that you are always striving to improve. So that's intertwines, as I was saying before. It goes back to the attitudes again. But it's about like making sure that your quality of your work is good. You're putting the hours in. Quite often outside just the nine to three or the eight-thirty to three or whatever it is that people do. Putting in that extra time to make sure that your quality of work is of the highest standard that it can be with your particular skill at that point in time. [Interview 7, Male].

Competence can be identified, not necessarily by the hours worked by beginning teachers but by their willingness to "do whatever has to be done" to achieve success in the classroom.

Beginning teachers believe that they may not achieve a professional status if they attempt to befriend their students. Competence is displayed through an ability to develop successful relationships with students, without the need to foster the notion of "best buddies". Competent beginning teachers are able to connect with their students whilst maintaining an appropriate teacher – student distance. This element of distance must always be maintained.

*No, that's the **biggest** mistake people* [beginning teachers] *can make. Go in there and try to be friends with those kids. I don't want to be your friend. I'm here to teach you. I don't see you as anything else but that. And, you know, going in there and trying to be too friendly and getting too personal with them. Kids will back away and they won't respect you*. [Interview 8, Female].

Respect is paramount and will not be achieved if beginning teachers "speak to the kids like friends" or if they "reveal too much information about themselves".

An element of professionalism considered vital by beginning teachers is their ability to deal with change. These teachers understand that education policy and practice must evolve in adaptation to economic, political and social change, and that they must play an important role in this process.

> *Yeah, just being able to like I've just noticed that there's so many things that are changing within a school. Like they're changing the outcome designs now. Being able to adapt from planning with old policies to being able to plan with new formats. And take on board the positive and negatives of the whatever you're changing.* [Interview 14, Male].

Positive reaction to change also involves a willingness by the beginning teacher to "try something different, and then knowing when it works" and "keeping up to date with what's going on around the place". "Having the ability to experience" is also recognised as important by beginning teachers. Perceptions of inexperience should not prevent these teachers from bringing creativity and innovation to the classroom.

> *I:* *How can you convey competence?*
> *BT:* *Basically just having the ability to experiment. Having the ability to experiment with what we've already done and knowing what works, what doesn't work.* [Interview 18, Female].

The essence of this conception is the beginning teachers' focus on the need for professional behaviour. This *professionalism* can be conveyed in several ways, but is nicely summarised in the quote that follows:

> *I always use the, you know, collar and tie and things like that. I think that's important for me. I like to do that. And figure that it relates that this is a profession. That I'm a professional and I work with children and with parents of children and my colleagues in a professional manner. That sort of thing. And also its so, its dress, its behaviour and it's also the type of language that you use.* [Interview 7, Male].

The following table provides a further summary of the elements of professionalism considered vital for the competent performance of beginning teachers. Salient features of this conception are described through extracts from the interviews conducted in this study.

A competent beginning teacher maintains an image of professionalism	
Salient Features of Conception	**Examples from Interviews**
Beginning teachers acknowledge the importance of presenting a professional image.	*I think it* [competence] *means that you can have a bit of a presence so it looks like you know what you're doing.*
Part of beginning teacher competence involves having confidence in your own abilities.	*You've got to have confidence within yourself to know that I can do this. I can do this with kids.*
Teachers cannot expect students to be motivated to learn if they do not convey enthusiasm for learning.	*And I think also a lack of enthusiasm for your job shows a lot of incompetence. I don't think kids learn unless there's some sort of zeal coming across from the teachers. Or you inspire them in some way.*
Competent beginning teachers go outside of their classroom to become involved in school/community activities.	*But I think generally it was more of what I did outside the classroom, than inside. Like getting involved in the community. You know, in sport, in debating. You know, anything you can get yourself into.*
Beginning teachers must be aware that they need to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times.	*Well I feel that professionalism comes in a number of forms. For example, the way you conduct yourself. With the behaviours you exhibit within the community.*
A good work ethic is vital if beginning teachers are to consider themselves competent.	[Competence is] *a good work ethic. What happens is that you're always striving to improve… You're putting the hours in – quite often outside just the nine to three.*
Students will not respect beginning teachers if they become too friendly. A professional distance must be maintained.	*Even though you might really like that class and you get on well with them. You know, you shouldn't overstep the mark and try and become friends with them.*

Table 4.5: A competent beginning teacher maintains an image of professionalism.

4.3.6 Category six: Competence is being 'self-aware'

A competent beginning teacher is self-aware.

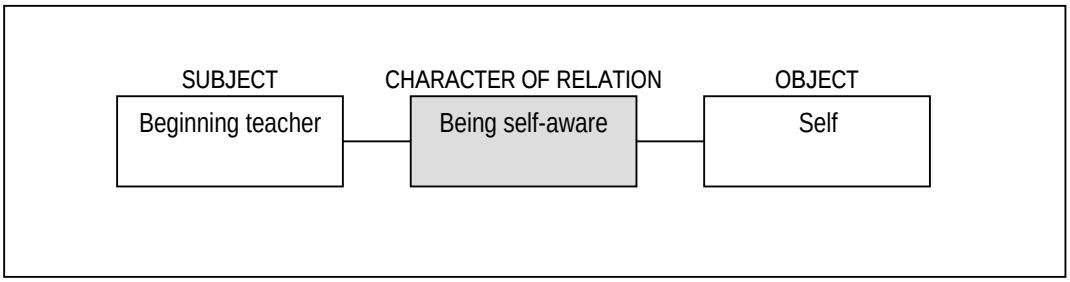

Figure 4.6: The subject-object relationship of Category Six.

The essence of this conception is the notion that beginning teachers, although new to the profession, have already established an awareness of themselves as teachers. The data compiled in relation to this conception has a substantial interest in the ways in which beginning teachers are aware of themselves, both personally and professionally, in the teaching role. Repeated interaction with the data compiled in this study revealed that beginning teachers are aware that they are *human* in the conduct of their duties. It also revealed a dual meaning of the term *human*. In some instances, beginning teachers refer to the importance of portraying the *human* face of teaching when trying to connect with students. At other times these teachers acknowledge the frailty of their new role when referring to themselves as *only human*. It is through the use of these two discrete, yet interconnected terms that conception six describes the emerging self-awareness of the beginning teachers involved in this study.

When teachers enter the profession, they do so with substantial undergraduate experience involving discipline knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and practice teaching. They also enter the classroom as human beings with personality traits, instincts and pre-existing behaviours. The first element involved in this conception has its interest in the human elements brought to the education context by beginning teachers. One beginning teacher refers to this awareness of self by stating:

I feel it's much more a 'me' thing, that I brought with me from my background. [Interview 5, Female].

Competent beginning teachers are able to successfully manage the everyday routines of the classroom whilst allowing students to recognise that they are people as well as teachers.

Since I've started I've… you realise that you've got to get down to the child's level. Understand where they're coming from. Show them that you're a human being not just a teacher there to teach them and punish them and… Yeah, let them know that you're human. [Interview 3, Female].

Part of this awareness and recognition of themselves as people involves a sense of humour. Beginning teachers, although acknowledging the seriousness of their role, believe that competence may also be conveyed through a healthy sense of humour.

An incompetent teacher I think is one who doesn't have a sense of humour. Is one who takes it all very seriously and doesn't get down and have a good time with the kids. [Interview 5, Female].

Competent beginning teachers are able to connect with students and form relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Teachers, new to the profession, judge their competence in terms of their ability to have a positive impact on the lives of their students. It should be noted that this impact is not limited to students' academic achievement. Beginning teachers are aware that they should contribute to and be an important part of all aspects of their students' lives. Competent teachers recognise the need to get to know their students fully and are interested in them as young people, not just as 'clients'.

Well the grade ones I think they just relied on me so much, you know. And they all just thought, you know, thought I was great. I mean you could tell, you know. You know, they're running up to you and you know, they invite you to birthday parties and all that sort of stuff. And

they just really responded to me as a person as well as a teacher. [Interview 9, Female].

This human face of teaching is also demonstrated by beginning teachers who feel that competency is reliant upon their capacity to nurture their students. In addition to fulfilling the academic requirements of their students, competent beginning teachers are aware of and sensitive to their social and emotional needs.

I mean, the feelings that I had inside were very similar to protectiveness of my own child who's had special needs and that. So, I mean, it was just ***so*** *strong. I mean I had to separate the two kids in my mind. It was just amazing!* [Interview 9, Female].

A strong theme in this conception suggests that competent beginning teachers are aware that they will develop caring relationships with their students. To be considered truly competent, beginning teachers believe that they must consider a priority, the best interests of their students. One participant in this study reported "I feel competent because I love my work and I love the kids". Another declared:

I think you have to be, not an emotional person, but just have that instinct within you. That… anything about children's feelings, you put yourself in their positions. In their position. What other ways do I care? For their future. For their future. Yep! [Interview 13, Female].

In addition to keeping in touch with their *human* side, competent beginning teachers are not afraid to admit that they are *only human*. They are aware that, as newcomers to the profession, they do not yet have all of the answers to the dilemmas uncovered in everyday classroom life.

You know, we're only human. We all make mistakes. And that, sort of, like a real-life thing for the kids to understand as well. They're gonna make mistakes. They have to make mistakes if they're going to learn. [Interview 1, Male].

For beginning teachers, being competent requires an admission that they are likely to make mistakes and will not be successful in all areas of their new position. Beginning teachers admit that they "will be incompetent at some things" and "not able to do everything straight away".

> *I think we were both trying to be competent but she* [another first year teacher] *was, she struggled in that she tried to do so much. Tried to get everything done all the time and it just became more and more work. So she was working late at night. Just, it just kept building up. So I think competency is the ability to sort of say, "look, I can't do everything."* [Interview 4, Female].

Whilst admitting that they may not be completely prepared for the complex role of the teacher, those beginning their professional careers still consider themselves competent if they seek assistance and remain flexible. When faced with a situation that they may not be prepared to deal with, competent beginning teachers "ask for help", "get advice from other teachers", "watch other teachers teach" and "share resources".

These behaviours should not be equated with incompetence, but rather should be considered the natural reaction of newly appointed teachers wishing to expand their repertoire of coping strategies.

> *Yeah, I must admit, I search, I search within myself and ask lots of questions when I have a bad day. And, you know, as I said, I access those people* [other teachers], *the Deputy, the teacher next door. All that sort of thing. And I don't have any qualms about saying "hey, look. I had a terrible day. Help me". And even if it's just that I do all the talking and I sort it out in my own words. I think "oh hang on a minute. That's what happened. Oh I realise now". Then that then builds on to what comes tomorrow.* [Interview 6, Female].

Beginning teachers are aware that competence is not constituted by professional practice that is void of mistakes, but rather is demonstrated by recognising mistakes and seeking assistance in dealing with them. It is also identified through an ability to remain flexible in all aspects of teaching. Competent beginning teachers can sense when a lesson is not going to plan and are flexible enough to revise or restructure the original plan.

> *In particular you're on your toes all the time and that's the flexibility that you need to have. I mean, your planning. You can just have all this wonderful planning and it can just go out the window with two kids going off their tree. And I mean, and that's how flexible you need to be.* [Interview 6, Female].

This level of flexibility allows beginning teachers to adapt from a negative situation or one that may produce no learning, to a more positive, productive outcome.

> *I think that's a really big thing. You realise that you can't be perfect to start with and that you're willing to work it out and learn from other people. Someone who can, someone who can adapt and change in different situations. Different class levels. Different, you know, someone who's able to adapt within the school into different roles.* [Interview 15, Female].

As a final comment on this conception, it should be noted that many beginning teachers do not yet consider themselves competent. In answer to the question "what is beginning teacher competence?" beginning teachers are able to list and discuss a broad range of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, yet when confronted with the question "how did you know when you were competent?" they often reply "I'm not, yet!" It seems that beginning teachers are aware of the complexity of the teaching profession and acknowledge that they have a long way to go before considering themselves competent.

I: *How did you know when you were competent?*

BT: *I don't think I am yet. I mean how can you be after one year, you know. And especially with the year that I had, you know. Its like, you know, can I do that again now please* [laughter]*. You know, and I was very tempted, you know. I mean, when we were doing the class structures for this year because it's a school that's growing and there is a lot of joint and multi-age. But there are straight classes, but there's like thirty and thirty-two sort of thing in one grade level so they'd have to be split up. And the one way to do it was to do a one, two, three again. I nearly said "lets do it like that and I'll take the one, two, three again". But it was just* ***so*** *hard. I just didn't feel I could put myself through it again. But the other side of me wanted to have another go at it. But then I thought – no. I've survived it and everybody has said to me from just ordinary people to teachers who have been teaching for a long time "oh, you poor thing", you know.* [Interview 9, Female].

Some beginning teachers even go so far as to suggest that no teacher is ever completely competent. With the constant changes in society, education and children themselves, competence is something that is never completely achieved, but is that elusive condition that should be continually sought.

And I don't know if there's any teacher out there who feels truly competent. Like you get all your experience and everything like that. And you, like you can plan things, but because the curriculum is forever changing and education systems changing you can't, I don't think you can ever be truly competent because you've got to learn new - like the new syllabuses where they're all going to be at. All the experienced teachers have to learn from that again, so they're all going back. [Interview 17, Male].

The following table provides a further summary of the elements of self-awareness considered vital for the competent performance of beginning teachers. Salient features of this conception are described through extracts from the interviews conducted in this study.

A competent beginning teacher is self-aware.	
Salient Features of Conception	**Examples from Interviews**
Beginning teachers are aware that they bring with them to the profession, human qualities as well as pedagogical abilities.	*I feel it's much more a 'me' thing, brought with me from my background.*
Competent beginning teachers convey to their students, a human element.	*Show them* [students] *you're a human being, not just a teacher…*
It is important that beginning teachers get to know their students as 'people' rather than 'clients'.	*You know, they're running up to you and you know, they invite you to birthday parties and all that sort of stuff. And they just really responded to me as a person as well as a teacher.*
Competence should relate to beginning teachers' capacity to care for their students	*I feel competent because I love my work and I love the kids.* .
Being competent is sometimes characterised by the admission of beginning teachers, that they make mistakes.	*You know, we're only human. We all make mistakes.*
Having admitted that they are 'not perfect', competent beginning teachers seek assistance with their shortcomings.	*Because you don't want to ask any stupid questions that make you look like you didn't go to uni. So I was lucky with the lady who teaches in the preschool. She was very helpful and I could ask her some of those silly questions.*
Beginning teachers often fail to identify themselves as being 'competent'.	*I don't feel I'm completely competent – that's for sure.*
Amongst beginning teachers there is an awareness that no teacher is ever completely competent and they must continually strive to do better.	*And I don't know if there's any teacher out there who feels truly competent.*

Table 4.6: A competent beginning teacher is self-aware

4.3.7: Summary of section

The analysis of the data has revealed the different ways that beginning teachers conceive of the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence. Through phenomenographic analysis, six conceptions were uncovered from the pool of data generated from interview transcripts. This was achieved through a close examination of beginning teachers' conceptions of their own competence. In describing their experiences, the beginning teachers involved in this study recognised and explained their personal understandings of what it is to be a competent beginning teacher. Six conceptions were identified from the data collected. The following sections of the chapter continue the analysis process through an investigation of approaches to appraisal, as perceived by the beginning teachers who undergo competence appraisal at the conclusion of their period of provisional teacher registration.

4.4 Beginning teacher appraisal

The following section of the chapter will focus on an element of the beginning teacher appraisal process, as experienced by the beginning teachers interviewed for the purpose of this study. This will be achieved through an examination of beginning teachers' understandings of the appraisal conducted for the purpose of completing their period of provisional registration. All beginning teachers involved in this study had previously been appraised and successfully moved from provisional teacher registration to full teacher registration. This *rite-of-passage* is instigated and facilitated by the beginning teacher's supervisor, usually the school principal. In conducting the appraisal, principals make judgements about the competence of beginning teachers. When the beginning teacher is considered competent, the process of appraisal is complete.

An analysis of beginning teachers' responses to the question "how does your principal know that you are competent?" forms the focus of the present section. The results provide an explanation of beginning teachers' beliefs about the appraisal process, specifically, how their principal gathers information that contributes to a formal judgement of their competence. The section highlights beginning teachers' understandings of how their competence is appraised.

4.4.1 The process of appraising beginning teachers

After a twelve-month period of provisional registration, beginning teachers are formally appraised by their principal on behalf of the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration. On the report form, the principal comments on a number of teacher characteristics before making a recommendation as to whether the beginning teacher is deemed competent. A positive report enables the beginning teacher to achieve full registration. Alternatively, the beginning teacher is considered not yet competent and is required to undertake further teaching under provisional registration.

Each of the beginning teachers involved in this study experienced a successful appraisal report and moved to full teaching registration. According to their principals, each is competent. The following section introduces the process of beginning teacher appraisal as mandated by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration.

4.5 Principals' approaches to the appraisal of beginning teacher competence

The results of this study suggest that the process of appraising beginning teachers is neither straightforward nor clearly mandated. Although being supplied with some basic guidelines from the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, principals are largely responsible for the decision regarding competence, and for the collection of the data required to make the decision. It is the collection of this data that provides the main interest of this section of the current chapter. More specifically, the focus is on beginning teachers' *perceptions* of how the appraisal data is gathered.

During the interviews, beginning teachers were reminded that as they had achieved a positive appraisal report, they were now officially considered competent. They were then asked to respond to the question "how does your principal know that you are competent?" Their responses reveal that beginning teachers believe principals undertake the appraisal process to collect information about their competence in a

range of ways. In the following sections, five different approaches to appraisal are identified and described. They are:

- **Appraisal is investigative** – the beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data through formal judgement of teacher performance (Approach one).
- **Appraisal is observational** – the beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data through general observations (Approach two).
- **Appraisal is consultative** – the beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data through consultation with others (Approach three).
- **Appraisal is concealed** – the beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data through informal methods, most frequently without the knowledge of the beginning teacher (Approach four).
- **Appraisal is blind** – the beginning teacher believes that the principal does not gather appraisal data and makes a decision about competence without adequate information (Approach five).

To avoid confusion, it should be noted that in the following sections when the word 'principals' is used, it does not mean 'all principals', but indicates the principal referred to by a specific beginning teacher.

4.5.1 Approach one: Appraisal is investigative

The beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data through formal judgement of teacher performance.

According to the participants in this study the investigative approach is the most formal of the processes used by principals to gather information about the competence of beginning teachers. Within this approach principals use prearranged discussions, meetings and classroom visits to determine beginning teachers' progress. These occasions are generally predetermined by the principal and then conveyed to the beginning teacher, although at times, negotiation takes place prior

to the publication of a schedule. The purpose of the meetings and visits is so that principals can see and hear, first hand, how beginning teachers are adapting to their new professional responsibilities.

Within the investigative approach there exists a continuum of formality. Some principals meet regularly with their beginning teachers to provide them with a schedule of requirements including planning to be inspected, classes to be observed and meetings to attend. The progress of these beginning teachers is very closely monitored and substantial feedback is supplied. This approach may also require input from other members of the administration team and teaching staff for the purpose of mentoring or information sharing, however the principal accepts sole responsibility for the actual appraisal.

Part of the investigative appraisal approach may involve formal inspection of the beginning teacher's planning documentation.

> *This is to do with planning. With my planning, my principal just, I suppose, just wanted to see the overview of what we were doing. I still did detailed English units, Maths, Science, Social Studies and reading scheme etc. And that was plus the weekly one, I suppose. And that was, sort of my principal could actually see from that, that I was competent in that regard.* [Interview 1, Male].

For some beginning teachers, planning and its associated paperwork is very important as it represents a visual means of conveying their competence to the principal.

> *The* [principals] *check your planning and all that sort of thing. Like they had a look at it. I just did a lot of like paperwork. So I've got something to prove. Like if I did such and such, I'll do every pinpoint two lessons and do a lesson plan to show that I can actually do a lesson plan. I filed all my stuff and keep all my units.* [Interview 10, Female].

Similarly, some principals place substantial emphasis on the beginning teacher's ability to produce detailed plans of their intended teaching and learning experiences. This planning is collected and appraised on a regular basis.

Another element of the investigative approach involves predetermined visits to the classroom of the beginning teacher for the purpose of a 'lesson observation'. Very often, these lessons are scheduled early in the term or year so that the beginning teacher has every opportunity to be prepared.

> *Well, he* [principal] *came – at the start of the year he said like as part of my probation I had to have twenty lessons observed. He'd be there twenty times in the classroom.* [Interview 14, Male].

For the beginning teachers involved in this study, it was common for the principal to 'sit-in' on a class for the purpose of a formal evaluation. This procedure seemed almost an expectation for first year teachers.

> *I think at most schools they* [principals] *like to get around and to actually visit you in class to see a lesson, to see assessment items, etc…* [Interview 2, Male].

In some cases, the principal may also ask other senior members of staff to formally observe and report on the lessons of beginning teachers. In the secondary school this role often falls to the relevant Head of Department.

> *I had like three, four different Heads of Department come and watch my lessons.* [Interview 12, Female].

In addition to these formal, prearranged classroom visits beginning teachers also report the use of informal visits by the principal. Usually these take the form of a casual "mind if I sit in?" request, although it is not uncommon for the principal to "just drop by" and remain in the classroom whilst the lesson is in progress.

> *I: How did your principal know that you were competent?*

> *BT: She came into the classroom twice that term, just to have a look at what I was doing… so she took a group, kept an eye, kept an ear out on me.* [Interview 1, Male].

Beginning teachers believe that even these casual visits have a specific purpose, usually taking the form of "fact-finding mission" by the principal.

> *But yeah, so he'd* [principal] *come in and he'd sort of walk past and he'd go and have a look and see what the kids were doing. He might even pop in and look at their books. Just to see that things were dated and signed or at least glued in, you know, like neatly and things.* [Interview 4, Female].

In addition to gathering appraisal information from observation of planning and classroom behaviour, principals use meetings and discussions with beginning teachers in an attempt to make judgement of their competence. Once again, these face-to-face meetings may be either formal, informal or a combination of the two. For some beginning teachers, regular formal meetings are a prerequisite of their first year in the classroom. These meetings may also involve other senior staff and have several purposes, some of which are listed as follows:

- conveying information to the beginning teacher regarding school policies and procedures;
- supplying a forum for beginning teachers' concerns;
- providing feedback on the progress of the beginning teacher;

> *I mean, when I was in Queensland I had meetings with my Heads of Department every Monday and they'd go over lesson plans for the week and these types of things.* [Interview 8, Female].

In summary, beginning teacher reaction to the investigative approach to appraisal is that it is almost second nature. This is perhaps due to their recent transition from undergraduate teaching programs that require close scrutiny and judgement of their competence. For beginning teachers, this appraisal approach includes data

gathering procedures of a formal nature. Examples of the types of investigative procedures cited by the beginning teachers involved in this study include:

- formal prearranged classroom visits;
- formal observation of planning and associated documentation;
- formal, prearranged meetings;
- informal meetings and discussions about the beginning teachers' performance or progress.

Regardless of the type of procedure described, beginning teachers take this appraisal approach very seriously. Although based on quite a traditional model, investigative appraisal is obviously a widely used means of gathering data from which to make a judgement of beginning teacher competence.

4.5.2 Approach two: Appraisal is observational

The beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data through general observation.

The essence of this approach to appraisal is that principals form opinions about the competence of beginning teachers through observations of the beginning teacher's involvement in a range of school activities and events. These observations are not made at prearranged meeting times, but rather on an ad-hoc basis throughout the year.

Beginning teachers may be observed in the general conduct of their class. In fact, they seem quite aware that their performance will be closely scrutinized during their period of provisional registration. Beginning teachers believe that principals make ongoing assumptions about them, based on what is seen and sometimes heard.

> *Yeah. She* [principal] *says if she can hear us downstairs we're gonna* [sic] *be too noisy. You know like, its just a bit of a joke but at the same time you know that within that school you would not be expected to*

> *exceed a certain noise level. You know like, if it's distracting other teachers, it's distracting other things.* [Interview 16, Female].

Although these observations can happen within the classroom, beginning teachers understand that their performance outside of the classroom will also provide important data for their appraisal. When questioned about the types of observations that principals make as part of the appraisal process, one beginning teacher explains "generally it was more of what I did outside of the classroom than inside. Like that (principal) got to know me."

Beginning teachers believe that principals look for much more than expert pedagogy. Principals make frequent and constant observations of how beginning teachers conduct themselves in all aspects of the profession, including interaction with members of the school community.

> *Probably informally observe like their rapport with children and how they deal with the other children at school as well as their own children. And how they deal with the parents in the school.* [Interview 15, Female].

Another element of teacher performance that beginning teachers believe is being monitored by the principal is their basic outlook and approach to the job. They maintain that principals equate competence with a positive image.

> *How they… Like outgoing, happy personality-wise. Don't walk around with a sour head-down. Looking worried about things. Just your body language.* [Interview 13, Female].

Principal's opinions of the competence of beginning teachers may also be influenced by the beginning teacher's level of involvement in school activities and events. Beginning teachers maintain that they will be more favourably appraised if they make an effort to involve themselves in a range of extracurricular activities such as "coaching sports", "turning up to meetings", and "singing in the morning".

> *I guess the way you participate in school functions. Like involvement in committees and your point of view towards things in the school. Things you have achieved like the Level 1 computing and just, I've done that so I guess that I've proved that I can do that.* [Interview 3, Female].

According to beginning teachers, principals gather appraisal data through a series of observations, the results of which are used as evidence of competence or incompetence. During their first year of employment, beginning teachers are closely monitored by the principal both inside and outside of the classroom. Whilst the 'inside' observations are often formal processes, the 'outside' observations relate more to the level of the beginning teacher's involvement in school activities. In gathering this evidence, principals observe the beginning teacher's involvement in activities such as:

- school functions;
- school committees;
- musical events;
- coaching sporting teams.

They also make informal observations of the beginning teacher's:

- attitude to professional duties;
- rapport with children;
- interactions with parents;
- general outlook and personality.

Beginning teachers maintain that these observations contribute to the evidence collected by the principal and ultimately used to appraise beginning teacher competence.

4.5.3 Approach three: Appraisal is consultative

The beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data through consultation with others.

At the core of this approach is the belief of beginning teachers that principals consult with others prior to making any judgements regarding competence. Beginning teachers maintain that principals are not alone in the appraisal process. Rather, their decision is influenced by the opinions of other members of the school community.

At the forefront of the list of individuals consulted for an opinion of the progress of beginning teachers are the *teaching partners.*

> *I: Tell me some of the ways you think the principal may have gathered information about you.*
>
> *BT: Just well through the staff and like I think the teaching partner I have beside me. I think like they'd talk to each other. And I think I've got a pretty good working relationship as well. I used to go to her with my planning and ask her questions and that. I think she could realise that I could handle it.* [Interview 14, Male].

Because teaching partners work closely with and have unlimited access to beginning teachers, they are an ideal source of information. Principals frequently meet formally and informally with these teachers to gain added insight into the performance of beginning teachers.

> *Like the time I had a teaching partner and she was a senior teacher. So, I guess that the Deputy relied a lot on her feedback regards plans, whether I could handle a situation on my own, how I related, my relationship with the children as a teacher.* [Interview 3, Female].

Evidence from the transcripts suggests that beginning teachers are neither insulted nor distressed by this consultation, but consider it a natural part of their period of provisional registration. In fact, beginning teachers accept that principals will consult with most school community members with whom the beginning teacher interacts. Teacher aides are often an important source of information about the beginning teacher's classroom performance.

And she [principal] *was also in contact with the teacher aide that I had as well. You know, just asking various questions. This and that and how she thought I was going.* [Interview 1, Male].

First year teacher mentors are also seen as able to supply information to the principal.

I: So you had some meetings?

BT: Yeah, just, well that was mainly through our mentor. It wasn't actually with M [principal]. *Our mentor had chats with us. Then I would assume that that went to him* [principal].

[Interview 4, Female].

Another group who is consulted regarding opinions of the progress of beginning teachers is the teaching staff. Beginning teachers agree that this information is gleaned by the principal through "chatting to some of the other teachers … casually about what they felt…" These inexperienced teachers understand that their more experienced colleagues may be invited to express an opinion.

I: How did your principal get information about your competence?

BT: I think a lot of it would be word of mouth. Because we're in a closed environment in some ways. I work closely with six other people and all the subjects are team-taught. I think they'd have a fair idea what sort of teacher I am just from that. [Interview 11, Female].

Another group who may have input into the principal's deliberations on the competence of beginning teachers is the student body. Beginning teachers believe that principals, although not formally interviewing the students, are interested in what they have to say about their learning experiences and the conduct of the classroom.

I mean everybody is going to have a problem in the classroom. But if you're having ***major*** *problems and* ***major*** *conflicts with students, I*

think that would probably be detrimental to the way the Principal would look at you. But if you seem to be getting on well with the kids. And you seem to have a handle on everything. You're not panicking and freaking out Monday morning. You know, that would probably have a big, you know, a big weight on your judgement. Yeah. [Interview 8, Female].

Principals may glean this information from "hearing what the kids are saying", or through observation of how students react to the beginning teacher.

I: Other than teachers, who else might inform the principal?

BT: The students, too. If the students are happy and are progressing well and seem to be, you know, to be in a good environment. [Interview 15, Female}.

Another influential group with whom the principal may consult is the parents. Beginning teachers have a strong belief that the parents of their students "definitely do talk to different people including the principal" about their opinion of the beginning teacher.

I: It's not a private profession anymore, is it?

BT: No. No, it's not. It's out there. And I do get a lot of parents coming in and helping and all that. And, yeah, so they might, you know, say something to the principal about what may have happened. [Interview 1, Male].

Beginning teachers understand that because parents are concerned for the welfare and educational needs of their children, they "keep an eye on new teachers" and will report their findings to the principal.

I: How does an assessor, a principal, know whether a beginning teacher is competent or not? And therefore they will be signed off.

BT: I guess if they've had lots of parents beating a steady path to their door. [Interview 16, Female].

Whether these parents are reporting positive or negative opinions about the beginning teacher, the principal will consider the information and perhaps investigate further.

BT: But I think what happened with me was the fact that there were sort of a number of, I mean we had a few disruptions last year. And, you know, I was, I guess, I came out to the Board and to the parents and to the principal as being the one that, I guess, coped the best. And whose students seemed to cope and…

I: How did they know that? How did they know that they coped the best?

BT: I think its more parental sort of… There's a real lot of parental influence here. [Interview 2, Male].

Beginning teachers acknowledge that as the "new kids on the block" they will be closely monitored by a range of school personnel and visitors to the school. They also understand that the principal may consult with these individuals or groups, prior to making a decision on the beginning teacher's competence. A selection of the individuals involved in this consultative process includes:

- teaching partners;
- mentor teachers;
- teacher aides;
- other teaching staff;
- students;
- parents.

4.5.4 Approach four: Appraisal is concealed

The beginning teacher believes that the principal gathers appraisal data without the knowledge of the beginning teacher.

Beginning teachers appreciate that it is the duty of the principal to gather enough information to make a decision about their competence. They are also aware that much of this information is compiled without their direct knowledge. Beginning teachers acknowledge that principals have a "sixth sense" about possible problem situations and that they often "wander the school" to ensure that problems are kept to a minimum.

> *I: How might the principal get that information on, not just you, but anyone's competence or incompetence for that matter.*
>
> *BT: Yeah, start by observation. He finds out about people when he wanders around the school I guess.*
>
> *I: What would be another way?*
>
> *BT: I don't know. I was talking to a mate of mine. You sort of think when the principal walks past and you've got your class and he just keeps on wandering past. Are they involved in a group activity and walks in your classroom at that particular time and have a bit of a chat to them. See what's going on.* [Interview 14, Male].

Without being obtrusive, or trying to unsettle the beginning teacher, principals are able to move around the school knowing that their presence may have a settling influence on the behaviour of the students. During these "walks" principals can see and hear what is happening in the classroom and how the beginning teacher is coping with the new responsibilities that are inherent in the profession.

> *I think sometimes he* [principal] *can get a decent picture if he's just walking past… He's not going to walk past my lesson every time I was teaching. But, you know, just generally around the school. He might have a look in and see what's going on. Whether you're in control or whatever.* [Interview 12, Female].

Beginning teachers are in awe of the subtlety of the principal in "keeping an eye on" teachers who are new to the school. They speak almost in espionage terms about the covert operations of their primary supervisor.

> *He was there but he wasn't there. Like he didn't actually come in and physically watch me teach but he would walk in every now and then. Every couple of days. As I said, the information that was gathered was done very subtly.* [Interview 4, Female].

> *As they always do seem to have one ear to the ground and they sort of know what's going on in the classroom. You know, yeah, it's quite funny because sometimes, just being paranoid here. So anyway, the Principal would come up and she'd go to the next classroom, the one next door. And I'd see her coming up and think "okay, she might be checking."* [Interview 1, Male].

Some beginning teachers believe that there is another purpose for this subtle classroom observation. They maintain that this is actually a supportive action on the part of the principal to show beginning teachers that they are not alone.

> *Yeah, where they sort of, you know, on a regular basis have to make it that somebody in administration has to wander past the door just to make, to give that physical presence that they're there.* [Interview 16, Female].

Accepting that they will be under direct and indirect scrutiny during their initial teaching experience, beginning teachers understand that it is the duty of the principal to "sus out" [secretly find out] possible problems. Beginning teachers also acknowledge the skill of the principal in maintaining close contact from afar. Principals are almost intuitive in what they glean about the beginning teacher, even without being physically present in the classroom.

> *Yes. How you check kids' work. How you monitor kid's work. Whether you walk around the classroom. Whether you give them work outside the classroom. If you use any additional aids like maybe a projector or computers or you intend using it. Just if it's a warm and friendly type of environment. I think he* [principal] *can just pick up a lot just by the vibes of the classroom.* [Interview 11, Female].

Beginning teachers are not intimidated by the covert operations of the principal and accept without question, this subtle means of collecting evidence of their level of competence.

4.5.5 Approach five: Appraisal is blind

The beginning teacher believes that the principal does not gather appraisal data and makes a decision about competence without adequate information.

Several of the beginning teachers involved in this study argue that their principals did not have adequate evidence to make an informed decision as to their competence or incompetence. These beginning teachers are definite in their opinions that their appraisal was conducted without even minimal supervision, observation or mentoring by any member of the school community.

I: *Now,* [beginning teacher] *you've been teaching for one and a bit years. In the State system a beginning teacher has a probationary period of about nine months. And at the end of that nine months, there's some magical wand that's waved. And you get a piece of paper that you both sign and they say "okay, you're a competent teacher" and you get full registration. All right. Now, okay, here's my question. From, was it the principal? Deputy principal? The head of your unit?*

BT: *Head of my unit.*

I: *Head of your unit. So what we assume is that this particular supervisor makes an appraisal with some sort of judgement and says "now you are competent". Or "we judge you to be competent". How do they know?*

BT: *They have no idea.*

I: *Okay.*

BT: *Because, in my personal experience with that process, I had no one observing my teaching. I had no one look at any of my reporting documentation. Yeah, basically I had nobody who knew what I was doing. The principal had never even been down this*

> *way. Oh no, I'm sorry, he came down to find another teacher to give him a message. And I grabbed him, made him sit in a chair and told how to listen about how I wanting to get out of there. But that was about it. The deputy principal was the same. Never actually came in and visited the class or looked at any, at anything. So I mightn't have been able to do it. So no one really cares anyway. So, yeah, none of those top dogs came and had an interest. My teacher-in-charge observed when she had to. So when it came to that bit of paper, I was a little bit cynical, obviously.* [Interview 5, Female].

Although being aware of their compulsory period of provisional registration, some beginning teachers are completely unaware of the procedures involved in the decision-making process. Many question the ability of the principal to make such an important decision when, to their knowledge, the principal has minimal awareness of the competence of the beginning teacher. These beginning teachers argue that their principals do not have an adequate understanding of what they have achieved during their first year of employment.

> *I've never been asked for any of my, any formal planning. I've had one program meeting and that was at the beginning of this year. Where I took along my planning. And took along my class program. And took along the IEP's of the kids. I took all that information along and didn't open my book once. I spent three quarters of an hour talking to the Principal. And for the first time, I actually had feedback. In all the time I've been there, I haven't had any feedback.* [Interview 6, Female].

Some beginning teachers are quite sceptical of the whole process, strongly stating that "It's just a joke. It's a joke. To me it was a joke" and "He didn't really check up on me at all!" Another beginning teacher when questioned about how the principal knew that she was competent replied "I don't know how they think they know. They don't even really know me!"

It seems that for some beginning teachers, the appraisal process is a mystery and they have no idea how evidence is collected regarding their competence. Others actually question the notion that evidence is even gathered and wonder how an informed and accurate decision is possible. In summary, according to the beginning teachers who believe that appraisal is blind, principals make little effort to gather appraisal data before making a judgement relating to competence performance. As such, they are cynical about the whole process, but do not make a formal complaint as long as the outcome is positive.

4.6 Chapter summary

The initial sections of this chapter described the six conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers. This information was gleaned through an analysis of the data gathered in answer to the questions:

- What is a competent beginning teacher?
- What is an incompetent beginning teacher?
- How do you know when you are competent?

In presenting the results of the analysis of this research, the following six categories of description were revealed:

- Beginning teacher competence is being ‘well prepared’;
- Beginning teacher competence is having a sound ‘knowledge base’;
- Beginning teacher competence is ‘being in control’;
- Beginning teacher competence is ‘creating networks and partnerships’;
- Beginning teacher competence is ‘becoming a professional’;
- Beginning teacher competence is ‘becoming self-aware’.

As a natural progression to this line of investigation, the second part of the chapter presented a logical development of this line of investigation through the question:

- How does your principal know that you are competent?

Whilst the initial sections of the chapter described beginning teachers' conceptions of competence, the focus of the final sections was beginning teachers' understandings of how principals recognise competent performance. For beginning teachers, this appraisal is the ultimate judgement of their competence making it difficult to ignore the relational nature of *competence* and its *appraisal*. Interpretation and discussion of the results of the data analysis will form the basis of the following chapter, which will explore the relationships between and among the categories of description previously revealed, and comment on the appraisal approaches identified by the beginning teachers involved in the present research.

Chapter Five

Relationships among conceptions and perceived appraisal approaches

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presented the descriptions of beginning teacher competence that emerged from the interview data. These categories were constructed on the basis of beginning teachers' descriptions of the phenomenon of competent beginning teaching. Additionally, it reported the ways in which these beginning teachers perceived the process of appraisal, conducted at the end of their period of compulsory provisional registration.

It argued that researchers are required to bracket their own experiences and beliefs regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Effort must also be made to avoid surpassing the description of the individual's experience, particularly in the data gathering and analysis stages of phenomenographic research. Sandberg (1995) warns that as soon as researchers attempt to explain the emerging conceptions, the research is likely to be influenced by the many theories which reside outside of the participants' experience. Having uncovered the categories of description and perceived appraisal approaches however, it is justifiable to discuss them within the context of other research. In this manner, a more complete understanding of the expressed conceptions of beginning teacher competence can be achieved. This is the main aim of the current chapter which will revisit the six conceptions of competence and explore the logical relationships among them. In phenomenography, this relationship is known as an outcome space, and it is the outcome space of this study which is the focus of the following section.

5.2 The outcome space: the relationship among the conceptions of competence

An outcome space is manifested as "diagrammatic representations of the logical relationships between different conceptions of a phenomenon" (Bruce, 1996, p. 87). It provides a structural framework of how the categories of description may

be logically related. Quite simply, the outcome space of this study is presented as a map of the different ways that the phenomenon of competence is experienced by beginning teachers. This 'map' is presented in the form of a diagram (see Figure 5.1). Overall, the outcome space consists of six different conceptions and represents the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence as understood by the beginning teachers in this study. More specifically, it highlights the variations that exist in the ways beginning teachers conceive competence.

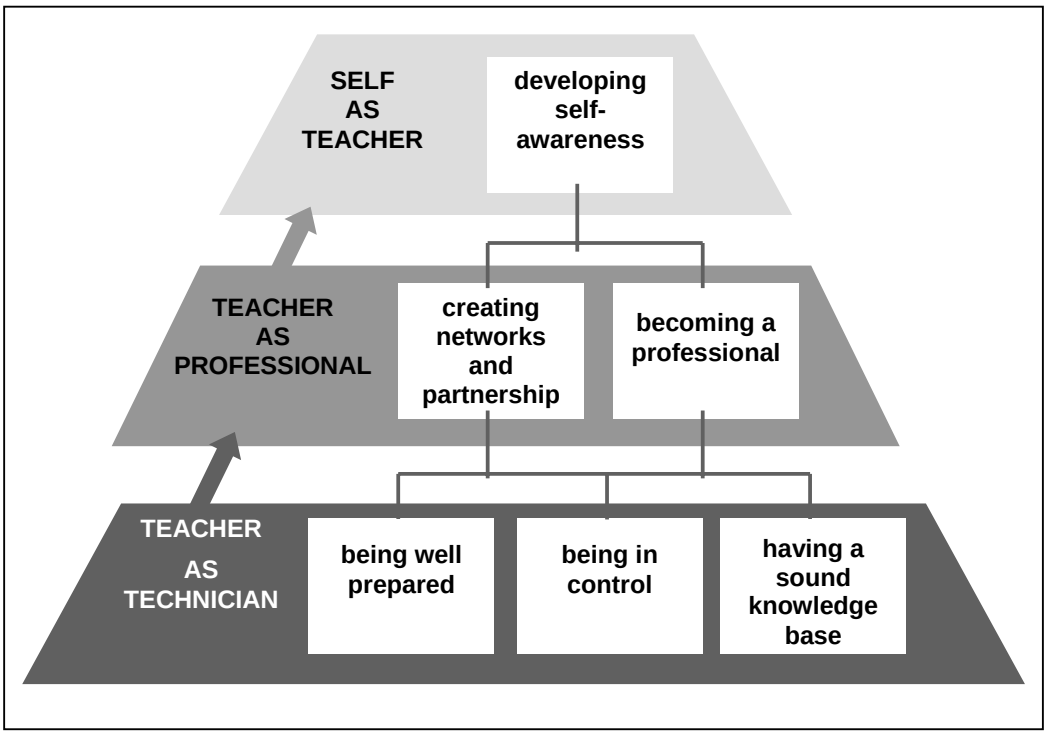

Figure 5.1: Outcome space of beginning teachers' conceptions of competence

Beginning teachers in this study report that beginning teacher competence manifests itself in a number of ways. These conceptions of competence are now used to create an outcome space which incorporates a three tiered hierarchical framework. Each of the six conceptions is located in a particular tier and the purpose of this chapter is to explain both the conceptual hierarchy and the placement of specific conceptions within it. The chapter will also provide discussion linking the current findings with the research literature.

Figure 5.1 represents the outcome space for this study and situates each of the six conceptions in a hierarchical framework. The conceptions *being well-prepared*, *being in control* and *having a sound knowledge base* are placed at the base of the hierarchy as they represent the 'nuts and bolts' of the teaching profession. Each of these conceptions is related to basic, procedural elements of teaching that are highlighted during pre-service teacher education programs and prioritised by beginning teachers. The transition from student teacher is seldom smooth with formal entry into the profession providing a series of new and often daunting challenges for beginning teachers (Knowles, 1992; Berman, 1994).

Researchers responsible for postulating 'stage' theories of teacher development identify the initial or beginning teacher stage as one characterised by a preoccupation with the basic necessities of classroom 'survival' (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Berliner, 1988). During this initial stage, beginning teachers adhere to a relatively inflexible series of context-free rules and procedures usually acquired during practice teaching placements (Berliner, 1988).

The present study recognises three conceptions of competence that resemble these procedural aspects of teaching. Due to their simplicity and their close relation to the 'survival' elements of various stage theories of teacher development, these three conceptions are positioned on the first tier of the hierarchical framework which is labelled 'teacher as technician'.

The notion of *being well prepared*, although vital to the overall success of the beginning teacher, does not require sophisticated pedagogical skill, nor long-term classroom experience. Beginning teachers in this study refer to lesson planning, time management and the creation of an appropriate physical environment as being vital aspects of competence. Introduced during teacher preparation, these elements continue to provide focus for beginning teachers as they assume responsibility for their own classroom.

The further conception of *being in control* is also a commonly agreed focus for beginning teachers who have a preoccupation with establishing and maintaining control over the learning environment. During their initial period of full-time

employment, beginning teachers place behaviour management at the forefront of their classroom operation (Kagan, 1992; Lee, 1994). This notion is evidenced by the beginning teachers in this study who consider effective behaviour management to be an essential part of their professional responsibilities. They express a view of competence characterised by the maintenance of an orderly classroom through the use of a range of behaviour management strategies. Beginning teachers also acknowledge that these effective strategies are developed as part of a 'trial and error' process and gleaned from continued classroom experience.

As the final conception situated on the first tier of the hierarchical framework, *having a sound knowledge base* also represents quite a simplistic view of teaching. Once again, nurtured during pre-service education, this conception recognises the importance of curriculum knowledge to the overall competence of the beginning teacher. Participants in this study refer to knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge of students and pedagogical knowledge as vital elements of their overall teaching performance, without which they would consider themselves to be incompetent. Although important, once again this conception still views the teacher as technician and not the sophisticated and complex facilitator of learning described in later conceptions.

Each of the 'base level' conceptions *being well-prepared, being in control* and *having a sound knowledge base* bears a striking resemblance to the initial stage referred to in much of the literature on teacher development. These stage theories describe beginning teachers in terms of performing at a level of 'survival', where their entire focus is on the procedural elements of classroom practice. Researchers such as Kagan (1992) and Lee (1994) identify several of these procedural elements that closely resemble the previously described conceptions. Both the 'stage' theorists and the beginning teachers involved in this study share a focus on the following elements of teacher practice.

a. *Lesson planning* is one of the many procedural elements of classroom practice mentioned by the beginning teachers in this study. Having the ability to pre-plan appropriate and engaging learning experiences is an element of competence of priority for these early career practitioners. It is

unsure whether beginning teachers themselves value the ability to plan, or whether they are influenced by the planning requirements of their pre-service education program or the expectations of their school principal. Regardless of the source of their motivation, these teachers express the notion that to be considered competent, beginning teachers must be able to plan effectively.

b. *Classroom organisation* is another element of competence mentioned by the beginning teachers in this study. Closely related to general planning, this element refers to the ability of the teacher to prepare the physical setting of the classroom. In this way, beginning teachers link their feelings of competence to their ability to organise everything from the learning environment to the preparation and distribution of resources. As with *lesson planning* this element of teaching practice is also procedural in nature and one typically associated with teachers at the onset of their professional careers (Kagan, 1992).

c. *Behaviour management*, according to the beginning teachers involved in this study, refers to the ability of teachers to control their students and the general operation of the classroom. 'Being in control' is a priority for beginning teachers who frequently describe competence in terms of their skills in creating and maintaining a problem-free environment where students operate within the guidelines established by the teacher. Although important, the notion of behaviour management is still considered quite procedural in nature, existing completely within the confines of the classroom. Once again, this element of teacher competence is common in the literature concerning beginning teachers (Kagan, 1992; Lee, 1994) as it describes a focus of teachers in the early stage of their careers.

d. *Curriculum knowledge* is another area of competence valued by beginning teachers. For the beginning teachers involved in this study, curriculum knowledge refers to an understanding of learners, curriculum and syllabus documentation and the content areas that they are expected to teach. This is a notion of competence that is shared by several researchers who have

reported outcomes of studies into teacher effectiveness (Schulman, 1986; OECD, 1994; Kyriacou, 1997; Turner-Bissett, 2001). Once again however, although widely investigated and agreed upon as an area of competence, *curriculum knowledge* is still a requirement for competent performance only within the classroom. It does little to describe a more sophisticated and holistic view of beginning teacher competence that reaches beyond the classroom, into the school community and into the beginning teachers themselves.

For the purpose of this study, these lower-complexity, procedural conceptions have been placed at the base of the outcome space, as each represents a focus on observable classroom practice and views the teacher more as a technician. Turner-Bissett (2001) refers to the technical aspects of classroom operation as those associated with the 'active' phase of teaching where the teacher's primary focus is on organisation and control. She maintains that although the 'hot action of the classroom' is important, it should not overshadow the more complex operations and relationships that are found both within and beyond the classroom.

The second or middle tier of the hierarchical framework of the outcome space therefore represents more than just a narrow, technical view of teaching competence. It sees teaching competence as reaching beyond the classroom and procedural classroom practice. This middle tier is labelled 'teacher as professional' and the conceptions located here move beyond the simple, technical view of teacher competence to a more sophisticated notion of what constitutes competent beginning teacher performance.

The middle tier of the hierarchy includes the conceptions *creating networks and partnerships* and *becoming a professional*. As described by the beginning teachers in this study, these conceptions involve more than the basic elements of competent classroom practice. Instead, they represent the notion that competence means more to beginning teachers than mere technical performance. The conceptions comprising 'teacher as professional' provided evidence that beginning teachers, although new to the profession, are capable of quite sophisticated views of competence. These conceptions make reference to competent performance outside

of the classroom and include an ability to communicate effectively with the school community and a recognition of the importance of a professional image.

Within the conception *creating networks and partnerships*, beginning teachers emphasise the importance of creating and maintaining open and clear communication with a range of school stakeholders including teachers, students, parents and ancillary staff. They emphasise that communication, which may take the form of verbal, written or visual formats, is vital to the feelings of competence experienced by teachers, new to the profession. This is a notion also reported by Nias (1990) whose research suggests that beginning teachers are hampered in their performance by concerns relating to the adequacy of their ability to communicate with a range of school stakeholders.

This particular conception is situated in the middle tier of the hierarchy because its descriptions go further than those which previously described mere classroom activity. Alternatively, *creating networks and partnerships* describes the ability of beginning teachers to expand their view of education, by looking beyond the classroom to the wider school community. In addition to those relationships nurtured in the classroom, beginning teachers describe other important networks and partnerships that also impact on student learning and teacher performance. This conception sees teaching in a context that is wider than the classroom.

Alongside *creating networks and partnerships*, lies the conception *becoming a professional*. This conception also describes beginning teacher competence beyond that which is observable only in the classroom. For beginning teachers *becoming a professional* is a vital aspect of competent performance. As with *creating networks and partnerships*, its emphasis is located within the beginning teacher, rather than within the classroom, although classroom practice is influenced by competence in this area. *Becoming a professional* refers to the ability of beginning teachers to convey confidence in themselves and enthusiasm for their profession. It also includes the notion that as representatives of the profession, beginning teachers create and maintain a professional image.

The belief of beginning teachers that competence includes reaching beyond the classroom to convey a professional image and to develop appropriate networks and partnerships aligns closely with one of the professional standards recently released by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (2002). Through these Professional Standards for Graduates, the Board outlines a vision for beginning teachers who will begin their professional careers in a complex social environment. The fourth of five standards, recommends that "Graduates will understand and participate in relationships that characterise ethical professional practice within and beyond learning communities" (Board of Teacher Registration, 2002, p.6). This is a notion shared by the beginning teachers involved in this study, who recommend that competent teaching performance includes the creation of networks and partnerships within and beyond the school, and adherence to professional and ethical behaviour.

Beginning teachers in the present study maintain that this image must be conveyed both within and beyond the classroom. They argue that a major aspect of competent performance relies on the ability of beginning teachers to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of community respect. As such, a professional image should be maintained in all aspects of the lives of beginning teachers – not just within the physical confines of the school.

In summary, the middle tier of the hierarchical framework includes those conceptions that highlight the notion that beginning teacher competence is more than competent technical performance. Alternatively, the conceptions of *creating networks and partnerships* and *becoming a professional* recognise competence as reaching beyond the classroom to the wider school and social communities. Rather than occurring in the 'hot action of the classroom', these conceptions describe competence as an interaction between beginning teachers and the learning communities in which they operate. Both of the conceptions located on this tier rely heavily on the communicative abilities of beginning teachers and their willingness to represent their chosen career in a thoughtful and professional manner.

At the uppermost tier of the hierarchical framework is located the single remaining conception uncovered in Chapter Four. The conception labelled *developing self-awareness* is positioned above the other five, due to its conceptual distance from the 'nuts and bolts of teaching' described in the lowest tier. Within the outcome space of this study, situated at the apex is a unique conception that has its focus on the developing self-awareness of beginning teachers. It makes no reference to the technical aspects of teaching nor the creation of networks and partnerships, as discussed in the lower tiers. What this conception does explore, however, is the notion that competent beginning teachers show evidence of an emerging awareness of themselves as teachers and as human beings.

Whilst the lower positioned conceptions have as their focus, the technical elements involved in the day-to-day workings of the classroom and the interactions that occur between teachers and the school community, this final conception is more about the *teacher*, rather than the *teaching*. *Developing self-awareness* represents the capacity of beginning teachers to be in touch with themselves, both as teachers and as human beings. Its descriptions have a dual interpretation of a common theme.

Firstly, competent beginning teachers are aware of the 'human' side of their profession where students are more than just clients. Beginning teachers feel competent when they recognise that they are 'people who are teachers' rather than 'teachers who are people' and that they will feel a natural affection for their students. The beginning teachers involved in this study describe a genuine care and concern for their students. Some participants even compare these feelings to those they have for their own children. Beginning teacher competence involves an awareness of these feelings and an acceptance that the feelings are an integral part of the profession.

The second area in which competent beginning teachers display self-awareness relates to a recognition of their professional limitations. Participants in this study maintain that teaching competence involves an understanding by beginning teachers that in the course of their duties, they will make mistakes. These mistakes should not be considered signs of incompetence, but rather reflected upon in terms

of the normal learning curve of any profession. Part of this competence involves the willingness of the beginning teacher to seek advice and assistance when required. Competent beginning teachers are aware that they are not 'perfect' and are willing to act on the advice and support offered by more senior staff members.

A final aspect of this self awareness is a notion described by many of the beginning teachers involved in this study. It relates to the belief that no teacher is ever totally competent and should always strive to 'be better'. Competent beginning teachers understand that they are members of a profession that is difficult to define and even more difficult to perfect. These teachers argue that complete competence can never be achieved and that competent teachers continually strive to achieve better outcomes for their students and for their profession.

As the conception positioned on the highest tier of the hierarchical framework within the outcome space of this study, *developing self-awareness* describes an emerging capacity of beginning teachers to reflect on themselves and their profession. This tier has been labelled 'self as teacher' due to its focus on the importance of the person, not just the teacher within the teaching profession. It is recognised that this sense of self as teacher combines the personal with the professional and that the self is a crucial element in the way teachers themselves understand the nature of their work (Nias, 1989).

'Self as teacher' is positioned at the peak of the framework due to the more complex nature of the conception that it represents. Whilst the lowest tier relates to the more procedural 'nuts and bolts' of classroom practice and the middle tier refers to the professional expectations of and relationships developed within teaching, 'self as teacher' describes aspects of personal identity considered vital for competent beginning teacher performance. Whereas the lower tiers present quite a simple view of the teacher that may be gleaned through observation, the tier positioned at the apex presents a view of beginning teachers that can only be achieved when they look within themselves.

This is a perspective shared with Turner-Bissett (2001) who proposes a notion of effective teaching that includes comprehensive understanding of a number of

education-related bases of knowledge. Turner-Bissett maintains that good teachers develop and maintain classrooms where learning outcomes are achieved when they have an operational understanding of *pedagogical content knowledge*. She argues that effective teachers can only demonstrate this pedagogical content knowledge when they have complete understanding of several other types of knowledge.

The model proposed by this researcher is relevant to the present study as it recognises *knowledge of self* as a vital knowledge base for teachers. Just as Turner-Bissett recognises that good teaching demands a heavy investment of the self, the beginning teachers involved in this study describe competence in terms of a self-awareness that enables them to maintain contact with the 'human' elements of themselves and their profession. Furthermore Turner-Bisset's research reveals the notion that a desirable attribute amongst teachers is that which enables them to reflect on their practice. Similarly, the beginning teachers involved in this present study recognise that reflection on their practice will enable them to accept that teaching is a profession where core skills are developed progressively.

This knowledge of 'self as teacher' enables beginning teachers to realistically assess their performance and to acknowledge their limitations. When beginning teachers demonstrate self-awareness through acceptance of their shortcomings, they are more likely to seek advice and support. According to beginning teachers, this is an important demonstration of competent professional performance. This is a notion reinforced by Turner-Bissett (2001, p.112) who argues:

> Knowledge of self is an important element in the process of reflection or metacognition; being consciously critical of one's performance implies that one can 'stand back' from one's performance and assess it without rationalisation.

According to Turner-Bissett (2001), to develop professionally teachers must possess the ability to reflect on their performance through self-evaluation and evaluation of student learning outcomes. To achieve this evaluation of self and others, teachers need to think consciously and critically about their work. They also require the courage to experiment with teaching styles, should current practices be less than ideal. She argues that this level of self-awareness is rare in

beginning teachers, and is more likely to be found in practitioners with extensive experience. Beginning teachers, she believes "tend to explain classroom events or teaching decisions in terms of external factors over which they have no control; therefore they cannot be blamed for poor or unexpected outcomes" (p.112).

With this theory in mind, it seems quite appropriate that the conception *developing self awareness* should be positioned at the highest point of the hierarchical framework in the outcome space of the present study. The results of the research of Turner-Bissett (2001) suggest that such awareness of self is not often present in the work of beginning teachers and is a more likely characteristic of their more experienced colleagues.

In summarising the relationships among the conceptions located in the outcome space of this study, it is proposed that the conceptions are located in the form of a hierarchical framework. It is argued that the hierarchy is organised from a less sophisticated view of competence that relates to the mere procedural aspects of classroom practice, to a more sophisticated view of competence that goes beyond the action of the classroom, to a description of the importance of awareness of self as teacher.

As outlined earlier in this thesis, it is difficult to conduct a study of competence in the absence of any contextual considerations. After all, the notion of competence is relational. Competence does not exist alone, but is always judged in relation to something – usually a predetermined standard or level. As such, the present study argues that any investigation of beginning teacher competence must include some mention of the appraisal process that seeks to judge such competence. For this reason, and in the light of the uncovered conceptions of beginning teacher competence already discussed, the following section will provide a brief overview of the ways in which beginning teachers believe that evidence of their competence is collected during the appraisal process.

5.3 Beginning teachers' understandings of the appraisal process

After being questioned about their conceptions of the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence, the beginning teachers involved in this study were invited to

make comment on their understandings of how their supervisor/principal gathered evidence on which to make a formal judgement of their competence. Because the participants involved in this research were interviewed towards the end of their first year of full time employment or early in their second year, the process of their appraisal was uppermost in their minds and they were keen to share their experiences.

During the interviews, the participants were asked to respond to the question "how did your principal know that you were competent?" All beginning teachers had recently achieved full registration and the researcher was interested in their views relating to the evidence-gathering phase of the process of formal appraisal. Once analysed, the findings of this aspect of the study could be compared to those of Thompson (1998) who investigated the appraisal process from the perspective of the principals who must make formal judgement of the competence of beginning teachers.

Close interaction with and thorough analysis of the data collected from this phase of the research study, reveals a range of appraisal approaches reported by beginning teachers. As previously discussed, it is difficult to investigate competence in the absence of an examination of the appraisal process that seeks evidence of such competence. As a relational phenomenon, competence is always judged 'in relation' to something – usually an externally created set of criteria or a checklist of observable skills, knowledge and attitudes (Marsh, 1996). For this reason, the beginning teachers involved in this study were asked to comment on the ways in which they believed that evidence of their competence was collected. What follows is a discussion of the findings of this phase of the investigation.

Chapter Four outlined five approaches to appraisal as reported by the beginning teachers involved in this research. Analysis of these findings reveals a number of discussion points. Firstly, beginning teachers are very aware of the system of provisional registration by which they are bound and understand that to achieve full registration status, they must receive a positive appraisal report from their supervisor, usually the principal. They recognise and accept the importance of their

teaching performance during their first year of full-time employment. Secondly, beginning teachers expect that they will be closely monitored during the provisional registration period and that within this time-frame, evidence of their competence will be collected so that an appraisal report can subsequently be submitted. Finally, and as a point of departure from the consensus so far recognised, beginning teachers report a range of 'evidence-gathering' techniques involved in the process of their appraisal. The previous chapter presented these techniques that were categorised as five discrete approaches summarised as follows:

- Appraisal is *investigative* whereby a predetermined schedule of meetings, classroom visits and submission of planning documents is conveyed to the beginning teacher. This is a highly formal approach involving extensive feedback and support.

- Appraisal is *observational,* involving observation of beginning teachers as they operate in a range of classroom and school contexts. This approach is less formal than the investigative approach as observations are conducted on an ad-hoc basis, rather than at pre-arranged times.

- Appraisal is *consultative* whereby the principal gathers appraisal data through consultation with a range of individuals with connections to the context in which the beginning teacher works. This approach is less formal than either of its previously described counterparts and involves consultation by the principal with classroom teachers, ancillary staff, support teachers, parents and students.

- Appraisal is *concealed* in such a manner that beginning teachers are unaware of when and where they may be the focus of the principal's investigations. The beginning teachers involved in the research presented here acknowledge that principals are skilled practitioners when it comes to discrete collection of appraisal evidence. They do not resent this very informal approach. They are, in fact quite supportive of the right of the principal to "wander the school" in order to "keep an eye on" newly appointed teachers.

- Appraisal is *blind* is the final and least formal of the appraisal approaches described by beginning teachers. In discussing this approach, beginning teachers make the assertion that principals do not actually make any effort to gather appraisal data, and make their decision with no evidentiary basis.

Close analysis of the quotes associated with each of these perceived approaches to appraisal results in their placement on a continuum that is presented as follows as Figure 5.2.

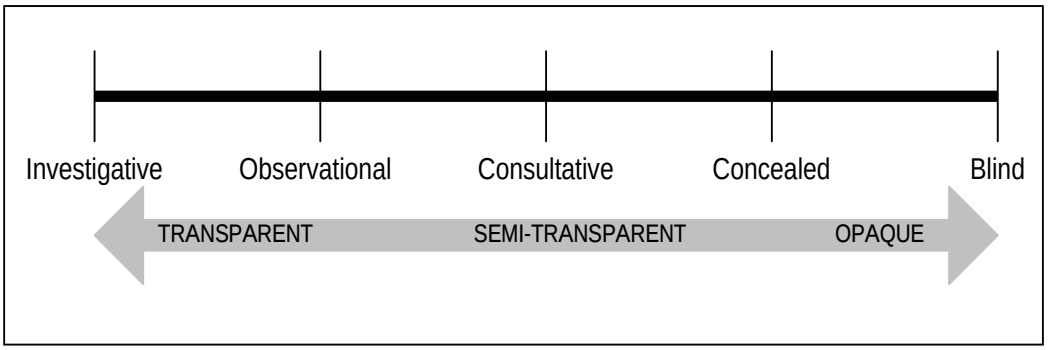

Figure 5.2: Continuum of perceived appraisal approaches

The perceived approaches are located along a continuum representing the relative level of 'transparency' of the approach. At one end is a very open approach to appraisal where principals make very clear how, when and where appraisal evidence will be collected. At the other end of the continuum is an approach identified by beginning teachers, where seemingly, the appraisal process is conducted in the absence of any evidence of beginning teacher competence and where the beginning teachers have no knowledge of the methods of evidence collection. The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (2002, p.2) recommends that principals collect evidence in a variety of ways, outlined as follows:

- observation of teaching;
- sighting of program plans;
- discussions with senior staff;
- discussions with the provisionally registered teacher;
- samples of student work;

- supplementary evidence including responses to questions posed by the principal.

Although recommended, none of these methods is mandated and results of the present study suggest that principals use these and several other methods of collecting evidence for beginning teacher appraisal. Results also suggest that some principals employ a highly formal process of appraisal, whereas others conduct the appraisal almost as an 'aside' in a most informal manner. What must be stressed is a statement that this study does not seek to examine the appraisal approaches that exist within the education context under investigation. Moreover, this research seeks to uncover beginning teachers' *perceptions* of how their appraisal was conducted.

As suggested in Figure 5.2, the beginning teachers involved in this study express understanding of a range of personally experienced approaches to appraisal. At one end of the continuum is located the most formal and observably transparent approach termed *investigative*. This approach is characterised by an open and predetermined series of evidence collection methods including classroom visits, inspection of planning, regular meetings and interview sessions. Within the *investigative* approach, beginning teachers are very much aware of how, when and where they will be observed and appraised.

Moving along the continuum, the next most transparent approach to appraisal is termed *observational*. Beginning teachers who identify this approach describe the monitoring of their performance through observation. Such observation may occur in the classroom, or alternatively in related contexts such as extra-curricular activity or community involvement. Although quite transparent, this approach is not as formal as the first, due to its potential to enable the principal to observe the beginning teacher in a context that has not been predetermined.

The next appraisal approach located midway on the continuum is the *consultative* approach, so termed due to the level of consultation conducted during the evidence collection phase. In this manner, principals seek the opinions of a range of school stakeholders regarding the competence of the provisionally registered beginning

teachers. According to the beginning teachers involved in this study, principals are likely to consult other teachers, ancillary staff, parents and students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the performance of beginning teachers. It is their further belief that this information is used to inform the content and outcome of the principal's appraisal report.

Located next to the consultative approach is an approach termed *concealed*. It is the perception of beginning teachers that principals are able to gather evidence of their competence in ways that are largely hidden from them. The beginning teachers involved in this study convey a belief that without being obvious, principals move around the school and are able to make judgements based on what they see, hear and feel. This approach is located away from the 'transparent' end of the continuum because of the concealed manner in which it is conducted. It is not positioned at the very end due to the fact that although not obvious, this approach is still recognised by beginning teachers who are aware of its place in the process of appraisal.

At the opposite end of the continuum from that labelled 'transparent' is an approach that is much more 'opaque'. This *blind* approach is described by beginning teachers in unflattering terms due to their belief that principals make appraisal judgements in the absence of evidence. For these teachers, the process of their appraisal is not transparent. In fact, they report a process in which they have no involvement. Some beginning teachers reveal that the first time the principal discussed their appraisal was when they were asked to sign the completed report. These beginning teachers are not able to make comment on how evidence of their competence is collected, because it is their belief that no such collection takes place.

It is of interest that of all the appraisal approaches perceived by the beginning teachers involved in this study, the *blind* approach is alone in its ability to elicit strong emotion. All other approaches are described in terms of acceptance and agreement, yet the *blind* approach is discussed with resentment and sometimes anger. Analysis of the data collected for this phase of the research also reveals the notion that beginning teachers are very aware of their status as provisionally

registered practitioners and understand the importance of competent performance within their initial year of teaching. They reveal a detailed understanding of the need for appraisal evidence to be collected by the principal and have a range of beliefs as to how this evidence is acquired. Apart from one approach, beginning teachers are largely accepting of the methods employed by principals as they seek evidence of the competence of beginning teachers.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter grew out of the results of the research presented in Chapter Four. In the first section, the categories of description, representing the conceptions of competence of the group of beginning teachers who participated in this study, were located in an outcome space. The diagram showed how the six categories were logically related within a hierarchical framework. To help clarify the variation among the categories, they were located in three tiers: a dimension representing 'teacher as technician', a dimension representing 'teacher as professional' and a final dimension representing 'self as teacher'.

In terms of Laurillard's (1993) description of outcome spaces, the outcome space in this study was identified as being hierarchical. Those categories at the base of the framework were identified as being representative of the practical, procedural elements of teachers' work and termed 'teacher as technician'. Above these conceptions, on the second tier was located a more sophisticated notion of beginning teacher competence labelled 'teacher as professional'. It was argued that the conceptions located on this tier described such competence as being more than just the 'nuts and bolts' of teaching. 'Teacher as professional' acknowledged the competence of beginning teachers as being more than merely *teaching*. Moreover, it saw teaching in a holistic light where beginning teachers are expected to perform their duties, both inside and outside of the classroom in a professional manner that creates mutually beneficial networks and partnerships.

At the peak of the hierarchical framework was located the tier labelled 'self as teacher'. The single conception representing this tier described competent beginning teaching in terms that were far removed from the technical aspects of

‘teacher as technician’ and even the more holistic approach of ‘teacher as professional’. ‘Self as teacher’ viewed beginning teacher competence as quite a sophisticated notion that suggested that beginning teachers were not competent until they had developed the ability to realistically reflect on themselves in the role of teacher. In this manner, competent beginning teachers recognise themselves as human beings, not just teachers, and are able to accept that they are ‘not perfect’.

The final section of the chapter presented through the eyes of beginning teachers, a range of appraisal approaches used by principals to collect evidence of the competence of beginning teachers during their period of provisional registration. The approaches were presented as located on a continuum of most transparent to least transparent. The most transparent approach was termed *investigative* and involved a series of formal, predetermined classroom visits and planning meetings with the principal. All evidence collection strategies were explained to the beginning teacher and scheduled at a negotiated time. The next approach on the continuum was identified as *observational* and included strategies whereby the principal would overtly observe the performance of the beginning teacher both inside and outside of the classroom.

Midway along the continuum was the *consultative* approach where beginning teachers described an evidence collection method requiring the principal to discuss the beginning teacher’s performance with a range of school stakeholders including classroom teacher, ancillary staff, parents and students. After the consultative approach came an approach labelled *concealed* where it was the belief of beginning teachers that principals gathered evidence of their performance at times and in places that were not obvious to them. The final and least transparent approach was termed *blind* due to the belief of beginning teachers that their principals made judgements of their competence in the lack of any formal evidence.

This chapter presented a discussion of the two major aspects of the research presented here. It identified and described the relationships between and among the conceptions uncovered in Chapter Four and outlined the ways in which beginning teachers explain how evidence of their teaching performance is gathered for the

purpose of their appraisal. The following chapter, the final in this thesis, will identify the substantive research findings before presenting a series of recommendations for supporting beginning teachers and for future research.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a final comment on the central research questions formulated in Chapter One. The first part deals with the substantive research findings in the thesis. In the second part, implications for future research on the competence of beginning teachers and recommendations for the support of this group of teachers are presented.

6.2 Substantive research findings of the study

The results of this study have revealed the varying ways beginning teacher competence is experienced by beginning teachers. The research presented here acknowledged the relational nature of the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence and sought to describe it through the eyes of beginning teachers. A phenomenographic research approach used a second order perspective to help reveal and represent as faithfully as possible what beginning teachers conceive their teaching competence to be. As an associated theme, beginning teachers' beliefs about the ways in which their competence is appraised, was also investigated and reported.

As revealed in Chapter Two, previous research of teacher competence was modelled on the process-product notion of competent performance, brought to education from the manufacturing sector. Grounded in the belief that improved worker performance resulted in greater productivity, industry leaders sought to identify the knowledge and skills required by 'competent' employees, so that they could 'assess' or 'appraise' the current performance of their workforce. When transferred to the education sector, teacher competence too, was reduced to a checklist of observable skills, created by someone external to the workplace and imposed on the teaching workforce.

This is an appraisal system that has changed little over time. It is mirrored in the context of the present study where it is assumed that beginning teacher competence may be captured in a checklist of 'desirable characteristics' used by principals in conducting the appraisal of provisionally registered teachers (Board of Teacher Registration, 2002). Adding to this less than optimal situation is Thompson's (1998) finding that even when supplied with a checklist, principals still bring to the appraisal process, their own conceptions of competent beginning teaching.

> Since principals' conceptions of competence precede their judgement of competence, it seems more likely that they comment on the characteristics they perceive to be most important or relevant to being a competent teacher. (Thompson, 1998, p. 309).

The present study asserts that if principals' conceptions of competence are brought to the process of appraisal, so too should the conceptions of competence of beginning teachers.

The research of conceptions of beginning teacher competence of other stakeholders in the education process was recommended by Thompson (1998) in his PhD thesis. The present study adds to the knowledge in this area and enables a comparison of the conceptions held by the two major participants in the process of appraisal of competence - the principal and the beginning teacher. As could reasonably be expected in a comparison such as this, several of the conceptions of beginning teacher competence revealed by the principals in Thompson's (1998) study, coincide with those elicited from the beginning teachers involved in the research presented here.

Comparison of the outcome spaces presented in Thompson's (1998) study and that of the research presented here highlights several commonalities. According to these studies both principals and beginning teachers:

- value a sound knowledge base for teaching and consider curriculum knowledge a particular priority.

- emphasise the importance of behaviour management techniques and argue that competent beginning teachers are 'in control' of the learning environment.

- agree that competence includes the ability to manage the learning environment through effective planning and organisation.

- conceive of competence in terms of the professionalism required of teachers in order for them to commit to the job, to participate in all aspects of the school community and to portray their profession in a positive manner.

- highlight the need for beginning teachers to possess a high level of communication skills. Whereas principals focus on the rapport between beginning teachers and their students, the beginning teachers themselves describe the importance of creating and maintaining networks and partnerships with a range of school stakeholders including students, teachers, ancillary staff and parents.

Just as there exist shared conceptions of competence between principals and beginning teachers, further comparisons between Thompson's (1998) study and the research presented here reveal points of departure outlined as follows:

- The principals in Thompson's (1998) study highlighted the importance of the personal qualities brought to the classroom by beginning teachers. They conceived of competence in terms of personality, self-esteem and effective communication skills. Although beginning teachers mention elements of these characteristics, they do not conceive of their competence as something within them, that they bring to the classroom from their life before school.

- These principals also mentioned that competent beginning teachers possessed that something extra and described it in terms of a 'presence' or 'flair' in the classroom. Although the beginning teachers involved in the present research

did not discuss competence in these specific terms, they did share one significant view with the principals studied previously. The area of commonality for both groups relates to the ability of beginning teachers to reflect critically and realistically on their practice.

Considering that these studies were conducted five years apart, by different researchers with a focus on two different categories of research participants, it is of interest that the results reveal several commonalities. The present study confirms that the conceptions of competence held by beginning teachers are similar to those expressed by principals. Although there exist some points of departure, both groups agree that competent beginning teachers:

- require a sound knowledge base for teaching;
- maintain control of the learning environment;
- are well planned and organised;
- display professional attitude and behaviour;
- utilise effective communication skills;
- reflect critically on themselves and their practice.

Beginning teachers however express a conception of competence that identifies a need for them to be aware of themselves in the role of teacher. This ‘awareness of self’ involves the ability of beginning teachers, when reflecting on their competence, to acknowledge two important notions. Firstly, they must acknowledge that they are ‘people who are teachers’ and not ‘teachers who are people’, thereby celebrating their ‘human’ side and how it contributes to their performance. Secondly, beginning teachers must understand that they are ‘only human’ and be rational enough to accept their imperfections.

This self-awareness referred to by Turner-Bissett (2001) as ‘knowledge of self’ is a capacity not often associated with beginning teachers. She contends that ‘knowledge of self’ is a rare commodity amongst newly qualified teachers and is

more likely to exist within the work of their more experienced counterparts. In fact, the findings of the present study refute the foundations of several well-known 'stage' theories of teacher development. Theories such as those proposed by Fuller and Bowen (1975) and Berliner (1988) are quite simplistic in their assumption that beginning teachers are unable to perform at a 'competent' or 'expert' level until they have been operating within the profession for several years. Even the theory proposed by Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch and Enz (2000) suggests that beginning teachers do not have a substantial capacity to reflect critically on their practice, but will develop this skill with extended classroom practice. It is the belief of these and other researchers in this area, that the central focus for beginning teachers is on 'surviving' the classroom experience by concentrating on the technical, operational elements of their work.

'Stage' theorists argue that due to this preoccupation with the 'nuts and bolts' of teaching, beginning teachers are unable to operate at a conceptually more advanced level where they view their work not in a singular dimension, but in a multifaceted and holistic manner (Kagan, 1992; Lee, 1994). Some researchers even go so far as to contend that teachers require an extended period of classroom operation before they are able to view and validate themselves in the role of teacher. This belief is not supported by the present study whose results suggest that at least some beginning teachers are capable of quite an advanced and realistic understanding of themselves as they undertake their professional duties.

As previously discussed, the conceptions of competence revealed by the principals in Thompson's (1998) research, align closely with those of the beginning teachers involved in the present study. Such findings suggest that during the appraisal process, principals are at least looking for what beginning teachers believe them to be looking for, and this is an important observation if the process is to be open and equitable. Unfortunately however, an assertion of openness and equity cannot be made until the actual evidence-gathering phase of the appraisal process is scrutinised.

For this reason, what follows is a comparison of the ways in which principals conduct beginning teacher appraisal from the dual perspectives of principals and beginning teachers. Results from Thompson's (1998) study and the research presented here will be summarised in Table 6.1 with discussion to follow.

Principal's view of appraisal	Beginning teachers' view of appraisal
Appraisal is *inspectorial* – the principal arranges a classroom visit and uses a checklist to make judgements.	Appraisal is *investigative* – the principal gathers evidence through formal classroom visits and meetings.
Appraisal is *covert* – the beginning teacher is unaware that the principal is collecting information.	Appraisal is *concealed* – the principal gathers appraisal data without the knowledge of the beginning teacher.
Appraisal is *via a third party* – the principal asks others about the competence of the beginning teacher.	Appraisal is *consultative* – the principal gathers appraisal data through consultation with others.
Appraisal is *collegial* – the principal appraises the beginning teacher within a supportive relationship.	Appraisal is *observational* – the principal gathers appraisal data through general/ informal observation.
Appraisal is *intuitive* – the principal makes judgements about competence in an intuitive way.	Appraisal is *blind* – the principal does not gather appraisal data and makes a decision with no evidentiary basis.

Table 6.1: Principals' and beginning teachers' views of the appraisal process.

As was the case with conceptions of competence, beginning teachers and principals share a similar view of the data-gathering phase of the appraisal process. Both groups agree that it is the right or duty of the principals to formally inspect beginning teachers as they perform their classroom duties and to convene regular meetings where planning is observed and discussed. Similarly, both groups assert that appraisal is sometimes conducted in quite a secretive manner whereby principals watch the performance of beginning teachers 'from afar'. Another appraisal approach mentioned by principals and beginning teachers is one

whereby, through a process of formal and informal consultation, principals glean details of the competence of beginning teachers through a process of consultation with other members of the school community.

Analysis of the data collected in each of the studies reveals that principals and beginning teachers have a shared understanding of many of the approaches used to gather evidence of beginning teacher competence. There are, however, some points of departure. The principals involved in Thompson's (1998) study suggested that appraisal is a collegial undertaking where evidence of competence is gathered within a supportive relationship. Conversely, the beginning teachers interviewed for the present study view their principals as supervisors and appraisers, rather than colleagues. Although there is no mention of unfair treatment or strict regimes, the beginning teachers still perceive their principals as occupying positions of power where the relationship is hierarchical. The principal is in a position of power. The beginning teacher is not.

Of particular concern is the belief of some beginning teachers that for them, the process of appraisal is 'blind' in that they have no conscious input into, nor awareness of the manner in which evidence of their competence is collected. For these beginning teachers, there is no transparency in the process resulting in feelings of frustration and resentment. Furthermore, it is questionable whether principals look for the same kind of things when conducting the appraisal of beginning teachers. In Queensland, the Board of Teacher Registration provides a Principals Report containing a list of five standards that must be displayed prior to the achievement of full registration (see Appendix 1). These standards are very broad and open to interpretation, leaving principals to make value judgements based on their personal conceptions of beginning teacher competence. The necessity for such interpretation almost assures that appraisal decisions produce different outcomes.

Thompson (1998) even goes so far as to suggest that the most successful beginning teacher will therefore be one who best 'fits' the conception of competence that is held by a particular principal. If this is the case, then the process of appraisal is

reduced to a 'game' where winning means finding ways to please the principal (Gitlin & Smyth, 1984). The results of Thompson's (1998) study suggest that although the process of appraisal is almost impossible to standardize, the principals who conduct appraisal are "humane educators who are concerned to be professional" (p. 311). Concurring with this belief are the results of the present study which reveal that beginning teachers respect the judgement and professionalism of principals. If there is any discontent it is with the *system* rather than any individual operating within the system.

The results of the research presented here reveal that principals and beginning teachers share similar conceptions of competence and similar understandings of how evidence of such competence is collected. This new knowledge adds to the knowledge in this area through its confirmation that although not perfect, the current system of beginning teacher appraisal is generally effective and widely accepted by all stakeholders in the process. Further consideration of these results also highlights some of the ways in which the appraisal process could be improved, and it is the presentation of these and other recommendations that constitute the following section of this chapter.

6.3 Building on the current study

As a phenomenographic investigation the research presented here has revealed the different ways in which beginning teachers conceive of the phenomenon of beginning teacher competence. Complementing these findings was a presentation of the evidence-gathering phase of the appraisal process, as experienced by beginning teachers. Although the outcomes of this research offer a more comprehensive picture of beginning teacher competence to that currently available, they also reveal the incompleteness of this picture and suggest the need for further research. The following recommendations grew out of the present study:

Recommendation 1: ***The present research should be replicated in other systems and cultures.***

This study was conducted in a regional Australian location with participants being drawn from State, Catholic and Independent systems of education. Replication of the study in other states, other countries and other cultures would help determine whether the conceptions of competence and approaches to appraisal revealed here, are similar to those in other contexts.

Recommendation 2: ***The present research should be replicated amongst other groups who are affected by and interested in the appraisal of beginning teachers.***

With the competence of teachers under close scrutiny from both within and outside of the school system, it would be of value to extend the scope of the research presented here to include additional stakeholders in the process of education. Now that research has revealed the conceptions of beginning teacher competence from the perspective of the principals who appraise competence and from the beginning teachers being appraised, it would be of value to elicit such conceptions from the students taught by beginning teachers and the parents of these students. This additional research would make more complete, the picture of beginning teacher competence. Furthermore, the results of such research would have the potential to influence the criteria used to appraise beginning teachers and perhaps even the manner in which beginning teachers operate within the education context.

Recommendation 3: ***'Stage' theories of teacher development should be revised in the light of the results of the present study.***

As revealed in a discussion of the substantive findings of the present study, several of the traditional 'stage' theories of teacher development are viewed as too simplistic for a complex phenomenon such as competence. It is therefore a recommendation of this study that such theories be reviewed in the light of the knowledge revealed here. One particular aspect of most 'stage' theories that requires immediate revision, is the assumption that beginning teachers are young adults who enter their university studies immediately after completing secondary school. Researchers such as Kuzmic (1994) and Nias (1990) argue that beginning

teachers are unlikely to view themselves in the role of teacher due to their still-fresh experience of the role of student. With an increasing number of teacher education students now entering their programs as mature age students, this assumption is flawed and the research presented here suggests that an overhaul of traditional 'stage' theories is well overdue.

With the knowledge that beginning teachers may no longer be identified as young adults with recent experience as school students, it is a further recommendation of this study that additional research is required. Such research should seek clarification of the conceptions of beginning teacher competence of beginning teachers who entered university from school, as compared to those who entered as mature age students.

Recommendation 4: ***Principals who conduct the appraisal of beginning teachers should be made aware of the results of the present study.***

Thompson (1998) recommended in his PhD thesis that principals be made aware of the knowledge revealed in his study in relation to the varying conceptions of beginning teacher competence held by groups of principals. He argued that such knowledge may serve to inform principals as they go about the important task of beginning teacher appraisal. Similarly, the present study recommends that principals be made aware of the conceptions of competence of beginning teachers in the hope that these too, may be taken into account during the appraisal process. After all, equity dictates that if principals' conceptions of competence impact on the outcomes of appraisal, then so too should those of the beginning teachers being appraised.

Recommendation 5: ***The process of appraising beginning teachers at the completion of their period of provisional registration should be made more transparent.***

Results of the present study suggest that although beginning teachers are aware of many of the ways that evidence of their competence is collected by principals, this is coincidental rather than by design. For many beginning teachers the process of their appraisal is quite a mystery, where they can only guess how their principal gets to know them well enough as teachers, to make an informed judgment of their competence. The very fact that some of these beginning teachers consider the appraisal process as 'blind', lends weight to a recommendation that the whole process is in need of greater transparency.

It is therefore recommended that in the initial stage of their period of provisional registration, beginning teachers are made aware of how they will be appraised. In this way, principals would meet with beginning teachers to provide details of how evidence of their competence will be collected. Additionally, a schedule of formal classroom visits should be made available to the beginning teacher. Naturally, informal 'drop-in' visits would still take place without prior organisation, yet knowledge of scheduled visits would at least enable beginning teachers to prepare in advance and allow them opportunity to display their professional capabilities. Equipped with greater understanding of the appraisal process, beginning teachers would at least be able to reduce their stress levels in one aspect of their initial year of teaching.

Recommendation 6: ***Principals and beginning teachers should be made aware of each others' conceptions of beginning teacher competence.***

Building on the previous recommendation, it is also recommended that at the commencement of their period of provisional registration, beginning teachers should be provided with an opportunity to share with principals, their conceptions of competence. This should be a mutual sharing experience where both parties involved in the appraisal process, are able to reveal their own conceptions of what constitutes a competent beginning teacher. It is after all, difficult for beginning teachers to achieve positive appraisal outcomes if their conceptions of competence are at odds with those experienced by their principals.

This study is in no way suggesting that beginning teachers should conform to the expectations of their appraisers. It does, however, see benefits in an open sharing of conceptions so that principals and beginning teachers are at least 'on the same page' when it comes to the important process of appraisal. Adoption of this recommendation would also ensure some negotiation, should the principals' conceptions of competence be at odds with those of the beginning teachers. Currently when this occurs, there is a real danger that these beginning teachers are disadvantaged in their appraisal report.

Recommendation 7: ***The results of this research should be developed further for the purpose of the professional development of beginning teachers.***

The final and most urgent of the recommendations posed by this study would see a revision and enhancement of the current process of beginning teacher appraisal. At present, this appraisal is conducted in quite a professional manner by principals who largely have the best interests of beginning teachers at heart. The process, although adequate, has the potential to deliver much more. Currently, beginning teacher appraisal could be easily perceived as being 'done *to* them', rather than being 'done *for* them'. The research presented here argues that with some moderation, the appraisal process has the potential to become a powerful professional development tool for beginning teachers.

It is therefore recommended that beginning teachers be appraised periodically throughout their period of provisional registration and that the results of each appraisal act as stimuli for professional development opportunities. It seems quite pointless to appraise beginning teachers only at the end of their provisional registration, when regular feedback could provide them with a mechanism to enhance their competence prior to the final appraisal. Once again, closer collaboration between all parties involved in the process of appraisal would facilitate optimal results for each participant. For beginning teachers, opportunities to develop their craft would be provided whilst the benefits to principals would come in the form of a more competent beginning teacher workforce.

6.4 Epilogue

This thesis has added to the knowledge of beginning teacher competence and its appraisal. Importantly, using a phenomenographic research approach, the study described as faithfully as possible the variation that exists in the way beginning teachers conceive of beginning teacher competence. In addition, the research presented here revealed the ways in which beginning teachers experience the process of appraisal. The major research outcome, in the form of a relational model of competence provided a more comprehensive insight into the ways in which beginning teachers conceive of their own competence during the early phase of their careers, and how they believe this competence to be judged. It was posited that this relational model be used to inform developments in the interrelated and equally important process of beginning teacher appraisal and professional development.

BOARD OF TEACHER REGISTRATION
QUEENSLAND

Principal's Report

Standards for the Attainment of Full Registration

To be completed by the principal (or other appropriate person)

Name of Provisionally Registered Teacher:
Name of School / Institution:
Registration Number of Provisionally Registered Teacher:

You are asked to judge this teacher's competence against each of the five (5) standards. The indicators provide a general guide to the kinds of performance, knowledge and attitudes required to satisfy the standard. You should use your professional judgement, supported by evidence, in deciding whether the standard has been met. Please tick the appropriate boxes. You may also include comments if you wish. For full registration, the Board would normally expect all 5 standards to be met. If all standards have not been met, and you intend to recommend full registration, you will need to provide a brief explanation overleaf.

Standard 1 Possesses and applies appropriate knowledge bases

☐ **COMPETENT** ☐ **NOT YET COMPETENT**

Possible indicators:
- Demonstrates sound professional and disciplinary knowledge
- Draws on these to design curriculum and plan for learning outcomes
- Possesses and applies a range of assessment and reporting techniques

COMMENTS (optional):

Standard 2 Possesses and applies a range of literacies relevant to role

☐ **COMPETENT** ☐ **NOT YET COMPETENT**

Possible indicators:
- Displays a high level of personal oral and written language proficiency
- Contributes to students' language, literacy and numeracy development appropriate to role
- Exhibits intercultural communication skills and awareness
- Demonstrates effective use of information and communication

COMMENTS (optional):

Standard 3 Creates supportive and intellectually challenging learning environments to engage all learners

☐ **COMPETENT** ☐ **NOT YET COMPETENT**

Possible indicators:
- Provides a positive, safe and supportive learning environment
- Creates flexible and innovative learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful for all students
- Provides inclusive learning opportunities that cater for diversity
- Promotes students' higher order and critical thinking skills

COMMENTS (optional):

Standard 4 Participates in professional relationships within and beyond the school

☐ **COMPETENT** ☐ **NOT YET COMPETENT**

Possible indicators:
- Establishes and maintains sound relationships with students and parents
- Collaborates effectively with professional teams, providing leadership where appropriate
- Participates in professional networks
- Establishes and maintains professional relationships with agencies

COMMENTS (optional):

Standard 5 Commits to reflective practice and ongoing professional renewal

☐ **COMPETENT** ☐ **NOT YET COMPETENT**

Possible indicators:
- Displays evidence of critical reflection on professional practice
- Demonstrates a commitment to ethical and socially just practices
- Engages in ongoing professional renewal

COMMENTS (optional):

Please Turn Over ☞

If one or more standards have not been met and you intend to recommend full registration, please give your reasons.

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