

Abstract

This study utilises a phenomenographic approach to investigate teacher conceptions of student engagement in learning. The research question asks: “What are the qualitatively different conceptions of student engagement in learning held by secondary English teachers in Central Queensland?” The research aims to contribute to knowledge about student engagement by investigating the teacher perspectives generally ignored in the research literature. This thesis begins with a review of academic research, scholarship, and government documents where multiple and conflicting understandings of engagement are identified.

Phenomenography has been chosen as the empirical research approach because it is designed to map variation in understandings. Standard phenomenographic analysis is used in conjunction with two frameworks congruent with phenomenography. The first framework is based on understandings of *intentionality* and the second on understandings of *awareness*. Together these frameworks allow for in-depth analysis of conceptions by identifying the parts and contexts of conceptions and differentiating between the participant’s understanding and his or her conception of how this understanding is facilitated.

The empirical component of the research involves semi-structured interviews with 20 Central Queensland secondary English teachers about their classroom experiences with student engagement. These data are transcribed and analysed as per phenomenographic protocol. This study identifies six conceptions within the *what* aspect, teacher conceptions of student engagement. These correspond with three conceptions comprising the *how* aspect, teacher conceptions of how to facilitate student engagement.

The findings of the empirical research and scholarly review of literature build conceptual knowledge about student engagement. This research indicates that educational stakeholders do not hold similar understandings of student engagement. If the concept of student engagement is to become educationally fruitful, the term must be more explicitly defined in educational research and government policy documents to promote shared understandings among stakeholder groups.

Teacher conceptions of student engagement in learning: A phenomenographic investigation

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Michael Z. Irvin, who was the first Dr. Irvin
in our family.

Declaration

I declare that the main text is my own work and that such work has not been submitted as a requirement for the award of a degree at Central Queensland University or any other institution of higher learning.

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