Round Table

Host Name: Felicity Healey-Benson (doctoral student, UWTSD)

Round Table Title:

Navigating the phenomenological and phenomenographic terrain as a doctoral student in a

Networked Learning context

Elevator pitch

Whilst recognising "*there is no such thing as one phenomenology, and if there could be such a thing it would never become anything like a philosophical technique'* (Heidegger, 1982, p328), the proliferation of various strains of phenomenological and phenomenographic research has resulted in misunderstandings and poor practises, with some authors contradicting each other (Groenewald, 2004). De-mystification of the choices and their implication across the various approaches and techniques is needed. An improved clarity would potentially motivate a more confident and robust application of phenomenology, to the advantage of the networked learning research community and its' research benefactors. This round-table will provide an opportunity for researchers to advance the understanding of the potential variants of design, results and value between different phenomenological and phenomenographic approaches adopted in a networked learning context.

Background

Engaging in phenomenological research is challenging (Caelli, 2001). Despite common roots in the philosophical works of Husserl (1931), Heidegger (1927/1962), and Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), methodologically, phenomenology has evolved in many ways. Many novice researchers, even once over the hurdle of a comfortable alignment to a philosophical movement must then further negotiate many permutations of research design to garner insight on the practicalities and rewards of a phenomenological research study. Despite techniques and approaches published by heavy-weight practitioners such as van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994), it remains a tall order to clearly distinguish between different phenomenological research study designs or identify whether a phenomenological study has been run badly or not. Problems are exacerbated when attempting to align a phenomenological attitude to networked learning. In contrast, as a second-order research perspective, with a focus on the experience of learning as opposed to learning itself (Marton et al., 1993), phenomenography is more prevalent than phenomenology in a networked learning context (Dohn, 2006, Oberg & Bell 2012). Analysis of papers submitted to the Networked Learning Conference from 1998-2018 (11 conferences) reveals only made use of phenomenological methodology, twelve phenomenographic. Discussion of why selected methods were employed was limited or not documented. Part of the weaker interest in the use of phenomenology in a networked learning context may lie in the aforementioned issues. Possibly this pattern is set to change, with the more recent post-

intential phenomenology offering by Vagle (2016). Underpinned by deleuzoguattarian thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), the latest phenomenological evolution concentrates on the 'variant' features of a phenomenon, offering the potential *to 'join the conversation about multiplicity, difference and particularity'* (Vagle, 2014)

The goal of the discussion is to surface, in an open and pragmatic way, whether phenomenology is deemed less valuable than phenomenography, or just more difficult or confusing to administer, and if so, what can be done to encourage its more active employ in networked learning research.

Examples of Questions

1.   For what purposes can phenomenological and phenomenographic research design be employed in a networked learning context?

2.   What are the issues and challenges presented by the adoption of phenomenological research design in a networked learning context?

3.   Compare and contrast various methods and data instruments within a **phenomenology** and **phenomenography** study

4.   What are the key differences between the results from phenomenographic and the phenomenological analysis?

5.   Can or should **phenomenology** and **phenomenography** be used together for triangulation purposes?

6.   Is there a networked learning research context where a specific phenomenological or phenomenographic approach provides more use or utility than another?

7.   How could the networked learning community promote more phenomenological study?

Goal: Illustrate what you would like to achieve as a collective outcome:

Discussions are targeted primarily at doctoral students and novice researchers deliberating between or avoiding phenomenology and phenomenography. The goal is to surface the issues/challenges behind the weaker interest in phenomenology in a learning network context. It is an opportunity for researchers to advance the understanding of novice researchers on the benefits and value of different phenomenological and phenomenographic approaches adopted within a networked learning context.

How to engage the participants into the discussion:

Discussions are targeted primarily at doctoral students and novice researchers deliberating over phenomenological research strategy yet experienced practitioners are equally valid.

Questions will be worked through in order.

In addition, one slide/poster of boxed text prompts will be projected/displayed to stimulate threads of discussion

- Phenomenological philosophies e.g. HUSSERL, HEIDEGGER, MARTON et Al,
- Names of high amplitude phenomenological and phenomenographic researchers e.g. VAN MANEN, MOUSTAKAS, VAGLE etc.
- Researcher positionality, reflection activities (BRACKETING, BRIDLING etc.), data reduction and analysis (THEME ANALYSIS, CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS) and use of theory

These words can be used as a quick reference point to stimulate discussion around the points of contention within and between phenomenological and phenomenographic research, for application within a networked learning context.

References

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