

PRINCIPALS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Profound changes have occurred in education over the last ten years in many countries around the world including Australia (Beare 1991, p.13; Beare & Sturman 1991, p.16); and these have been reflected in the changes in the structure, form and organisation of schooling. This changing educational context has considerable implications for the professional development of teachers since professional development is woven into wider educational policy and policy making processes. Educational leaders, such as principals, have been formally identified in policy reports (Department of Education 1990, 1993; Department of Employment Education and Training 1993a, 1993b; Board of Teacher Registration 1990) and current literature (Day 1994a, 1994b; Crowther & Postle 1991; Owen 1990; Levine 1989a, 1989b; Blackman 1989; Fullan 1987; Duignan & Johnson 1984; Leithwood 1990; Leithwood & Montgomery 1982; Barth 1981) as needing to play a very important role in the professional development of teachers.

Overview of Educational Policy Context

The function and purpose of professional development of staff has taken on new meanings in national and state agendas for education since the 1980s. This is evident in that funding for professional development has become tied to mandated changes by both National and State Governments.

The shifts in the way professional development has been viewed can be understood by tracing significant changes and directions to educational policies during this period.

The international climate for professional development can be understood by analysing key changes or 'restructurings' to educational systems during the 1980s across countries such as the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and Australia. Beare (1991) identified a number of common themes and trends in each of these countries. Some of these common trends included: school based management; the increasing role played by National governments in education; the economic imperative influencing education; restructurings being driven by political rather than educational considerations; and the introduction of school site councils. These wider changes have been translated into influences on Queensland schooling and some of these include: the introduction of a national curriculum and its translation in the Queensland context; student performance standards; extended forms of assessment for students; new forms of accountability for schools and leaders; national consistency in terms of work based competencies for 15 to 19 year olds; and in short, a concern for the twin goals of effectiveness and efficiency.

The impetus for professional development since the late 1980s has been the fulfillment of new (imposed) Government policy changes. This has meant that localised needs and the wider needs identified by teachers and administrators have either been rationalised or overlooked (Bell & Day 1991). The period since the late 1980s has witnessed a movement to posit professional development within a 'control' agenda and mechanisms such as corporate managerialism have been advocated for managers as an efficient and effective way to manage the school. Corporate managerialism is concerned with reduced public expenditure and ensuring that organisations become more efficient (Reid 1993, p.130). Accountability measures and surveillance techniques have also been put in place to ensure adherence to the new agenda. A parallel but contradictory trend (eg. Smyth 1993; Knight, Lingard & Bartlett 1993)

which has ebbed and flowed within these national change forces has been the movement to school based management which places greater emphasis upon the local school and its community for educational decision making. The resultant tension has significant implications for professional development and the role of the principal.

The pervasive concern which is raised by Maxwell (1993, p.64) in the literature is that in the current policy context, professional development will serve the needs of the institution, articulated by the corporate plan to the detriment of innovative proposals that schools may wish to implement. While opportunities for professional development arise as a consequence of school needs and priorities, and individual needs (Evans 1987, p.6), the current agenda is emphasising institutional demands. The ideal is a devolving system of school management where principals 'supported by school support centre coordinators, (are) responsible for in-service [education] for all teachers and non-teaching personnel in the school' (Department of Education 1990, p.50) and has implications for the principal's role. This new role requires a particular type of leader in schools of the 1990s. The implications for leadership will be briefly reviewed next.

Implications for Leadership

In a turbulent policy context which is fraught with changes and contradictions, school leadership has a vital role to play in ensuring that professional development meets the need of individuals, the school and the system. Drucker (in Caldwell 1993, p.158) stated that:

A time for turbulence is also one of great opportunity for those who can understand, accept, and exploit the new realities. It is above all a time for leadership

The position taken in this paper is that school leadership has a vital role to play in ensuring that professional development not only serves corporate needs but also meets the needs of individual teachers and the

school, and gives credence to wider issues that are perennial in education. For principals, this would mean having a broader understanding of what is meant by professional development and subsequent commitment to using different approaches to it. This would mean that leaders of schools would not only think about how to deliver changes and new policies, but that they would exercise a type of leadership that transcends the technical and managerial approach inherent in corporate managerialism so that 'moral' and 'professional' accountability, not just 'contractual' accountability would be a central concern.

One of the assumptions underpinning the notion of leadership in this thesis is that both teaching and administration have a moral purpose (Day 1994b; Fullan & Hargreaves 1991). Following Day's (1994b, p.7) approach, it is argued that just as teaching is concerned with the betterment of students, so too is the principalship concerned with the betterment of teachers. Moral accountability is concerned with teachers' relationships with their pupils, parents and colleagues, and professional accountability is concerned with upholding the standards of ethics of one's profession (Eraut 1993, p.24). The aspect that moral and professional accountability share is the notion of 'self accountability' or accountability to one's professional conscience. Translating this to the principalship suggests that principals are morally and professionally accountable to their teachers and through professional development, they can provide opportunities for teachers to tend to the moral and professional dimensions of their role.

A challenge then for principals is to ensure that moral and professional accountability are central concerns for their teachers and themselves. In times of considerable government intervention, the version of accountability which is dominant is 'contractual' which refers to accountability to one's employer or the school or governments (Eraut 1993, p.25). Eraut (1993, p.26) cautions that when contractual accountability becomes all embracing, the notions of moral and professional accountability tend to dissipate and he goes on to say:

...moral and professional accountability are important sources of teacher motivation towards self development; policies which neglect them by overstressing contractual accountability could well prove counterproductive

Maintaining a balance between contractual accountability and alternative forms of accountability (eg. moral and professional) is problematic for principals in their role fulfillment because of their formal position within the educational system. That they are located at the interface between the system and the local community and are accountable to both groups (Nadebaum 1991, p.13) creates tensions in their role. Principals face the contradiction between facilitating a collaborative leadership style required by self managing schools on the

one hand and fulfilling the requirements of a corporate manager with its notions of supervision, hierarchy and control on the other (McCollow 1989, p.11).

From the research and policy literature, it appears that corporate needs are driving the professional development opportunities for teachers in schools so that a limited type of professional development is provided. This means that professional development which would serve other needs is not being implemented.

Given the current context and the multi-faceted challenges confronting principals, this study aims to understand the individual principal's conceptions of professional development for self and their teachers in an attempt to investigate the meaning of the phenomenon of professional development.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH AREA

It is argued in this study that there is a need to understand what professional development and the professional development of teachers mean for principals outside the confines of theoretical constructs, or overarching world views on these phenomena. As Mitchell (1990, p.161) stated:

All meanings which are assigned to any education policy, practice, or program are relative to the values of the person who is intending meaning.

In the context of this study, the implication of Mitchell's quote is that principals themselves will make sense of professional development and consequently, it is the elucidation of this subjective dimension that will be pursued in it.

A phenomenological study is being undertaken since it examines the way things are grasped by the individual consciousness of key participants, in this instance principals. Unlike other research which identifies what role principals play or should play in professional development, a phenomenological approach is based on the assumption that the ultimate foundation of all knowledge is human consciousness (Husserl in Mitchell 1990, p.255). Idealistic models therefore have been

'bracketed' or put in abeyance, so that the lived experience of the principals can be amplified. This study therefore differs from most studies which have been conducted in the area of the principal's role in professional development since they tend to be based on empirical methods. A phenomenological perspective will emanate from the principals themselves. It will provide a wealth of subjective evidence which is often disregarded by other methods particularly used in the area of educational administration. Educational administration

continues to be dominated by a technology of control which is inherent in a scientific view of management (Bates, 1988).

In line with phenomenological research, a researcher's own pre-suppositions and theoretical constructs need to be bracketed so that the data (ie principals' experiences) can be examined without contamination. In this study, both policy reports and the literature will be bracketed so that data can speak for themselves. Of significance in a phenomenological study is investigating data which are based on individual's immediate experience of phenomena. Just as a researcher's pre-suppositions are bracketed, so too are individual subjects asked to explore phenomena via their immediate experience and not in the light of particular theories.

Objectives:

- *To investigate what principals see as the essential meaning of professional development for self and others
- *To investigate what constitutes effective and ineffective professional development
- *To investigate what principals understand as their role in the professional development of teachers
- *To explore whether principals' understanding of professional development for themselves affects or influences the nature and type of professional development carried out in their schools
- *To arrive at an understanding of professional development by turning to the lived experience of a group of principals

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The role of the principal in the professional development of teachers is an important issue and this is evident by the attention given to leadership in both recent policy reports (DEET 1988, 1993b; Department of Education, 1990) and the literature (Day 1994a, 1994b; Nias et al. 1992; Leithwood 1990; Southworth 1990; Fullan 1987). In the current policy context, which is one of considerable change, professional development has been identified as the tool for ensuring that the changes are actualised.

Within the current policy context, professional development has devolved to particular schools and this has implications for the principal's role and influence in this area. This study aims to contribute to the research literature as it investigates how principals conceptualise professional development and the importance they place upon it for teachers in their schools.

This study is significant because to date it appears that there has been very little research conducted either at a philosophical or methodological level which has used phenomenology to investigate principals' conceptions of professional development or principals'

responses to or concerns for teachers' professional development. After an extensive review of the literature, only two studies (one philosophical, the other methodological) were located which focused on the meaning of educational leadership and educational administration respectively. These two studies will be briefly reviewed here.

Mitchell's (1990) philosophical study explored the essence of educational leadership following Husserl's method and re-visioned leadership along phenomenological lines. The other study, conducted by Evans (in Miklos 1990) focused on the experiences of seven principals who told their stories and revealed the meaning of being an administrator. While both of those studies employed phenomenology to come to a better understanding of educational leadership, neither focused on the specific area of professional development. This study with its concern to apply a phenomenological psychological methodology to the lived experiences of a cohort of principals will therefore remediate a perceived deficit in the research literature.

That there is a paucity of phenomenological studies of education has been documented in the literature (McDuffie 1988; Chamberlin 1974, p.127) particularly in relation to the application of the phenomenological method to educational research. Although studies written at a purely philosophical and theoretical level began to emerge in education in the late 1960s and 1970s (see educational philosophers such as Greene 1973; Chamberlin 1974; Vandenberg 1971) and educational administration (Greenfield 1975; Gronn 1983), education research which has interpreted the phenomenological method (as identified by Merleau-Ponty 1962; Spiegelberg 1975; Husserl in Spinelli 1989; Giorgi 1985a) has not been taken up to any extent.

This study is also significant because it will utilise phenomenology as the philosophy and methodology for understanding principals' experience of professional development for others. So while the policy literature and the research in the area of professional development are providing particular and somewhat contradictory messages about the purpose of professional development and outlining a variety of roles for principals to play, this study will provide a different perspective on these issues by capturing the essential themes associated with the phenomena under investigation. The next part examines phenomenology as both the theoretical framework and the methodology. Existential phenomenology is the theoretical framework and existential phenomenological psychology is the methodology.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Definition

The etymology of phenomenology is from the Greek, 'phainomenon' which means the appearance of things or phenomena (Spinelli 1989, p.2). An appearance is anything of which a person may be conscious so that phenomenology is the description of phenomena as a person experiences them.

Phenomenology is the study or description of phenomena and these can be anything ranging from physical objects to thoughts or concepts. In this study, phenomena include professional development and principals' responses to the professional development of others. Principals' experiences of these phenomena will be understood via their conceptions, feelings and beliefs about the phenomena.

Background

Phenomenology has its origins in the European philosophical tradition. It emerged from the philosophy of Husserl, a late 19th century German

mathematician and philosopher and other contributors to the movement included Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Barritt et al. 1985, p.19). Phenomenology has undergone some expansions and refinement since the time of Husserl and today, there are a number of schools of thought within it. While Husserl's phenomenology has been labelled 'transcendental' (Sexton-Hesse 1983, p.5), other branches of phenomenology include existential phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology (Tesch 1984, pp.1-2).

The Phenomenological Method

Merleau-Ponty (1962) a leading exponent of existentialist phenomenology, explicated the 'phenomenological method' which he described as the entrance through which we can access phenomenology. The four key qualities of this method include description, the reduction, intentionality and essence, and will be examined.

Description

The aim of phenomenology is the description of phenomena rather than explanation. Phenomena include entities that appear or present themselves, such as professional development, physical objects, or thoughts. Phenomenology involves describing things as one experiences them. This means a turning away from science and scientific knowledge and returning to the 'things themselves' (Husserl in Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.vii). The consequence of returning to the things themselves (Zu den Sachen selbst) is to place a person's unique experience at the centre of any investigation, since all knowledge, including scientific knowledge is gained from an individual viewpoint (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.viii-x). Presuppositions become unnecessary since the purpose is to

investigate the given.

Reduction

A simple way of viewing the reduction is to think of it as a process where phenomenology requires taken for granted assumptions and presuppositions about phenomena be temporarily suspended or bracketed. The reason for this suspension or bracketing of the phenomena is to ensure that theoretical prejudices do not contaminate the description of the experience (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This ensures that 'the things themselves' can be returned to. Husserl's phrase rests on the principle that it is '... living human beings who bring schemas and frameworks into being and not the reverse' (Van Manen 1982, p.297).

Essences

An essence is simply the core meaning of any given phenomenon that makes it what it is. The search for essences, essential themes or essential relationships as they have been called, involves the exploration of phenomena by using the process of free imagination, intuition and reflection. Free variation is used to determine if a particular feature of an essence is essential to it (Spiegelberg 1975, p.63). For example in the case of the essence of professional development, a phenomenologist would consider whether or not professional development remains an essence without the essential elements of learning and change. Spiegelberg (1975 p.64) further stated that:

...essential insight requires that on the basis of such variation we determine what is essential or necessary and what is merely accidental or contingent.

Once a description is given, the phenomenologist tries to understand the essential structure of the lived experience. Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.xiv) argued that arriving at the essence or essential structure of the phenomenon is not the final step, but is a way in which we can understand the relationships of the experience.

Intentionality

Intentionality is an important concept to consider in Husserl's phenomenology. Intentionality refers to consciousness and contends that individuals are always conscious of something (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.xviii). Intentionality is the total meaning of the object (eg. idea, process, a person etc.), which is always more than what is given in the perception of a single perspective (Chamberlin 1974, p. 129). Husserl used the two concepts noesis and noema to reveal intentionality of consciousness. According to Husserl (in Sanders 1982, p.354) intentionality referred to the correlation between noema and noesis,

both of which lead to the interpretation of an experience. Noema is the objective statement of behaviour or the experience, while noesis is a subjective reflection of the objective statement (Sanders 1982, p.357). Rogers (1983 p.23) put it in the following way:

Intentionality implies both consciousness of objects and objects of consciousness... When they focus on consciousness of a given object, their interest is the noesis of an act of consciousness; when they focus on the given object of consciousness, their interest is the noema of the act.

To sum up, the four features: reduction, description, essence and intentionality are said to bring together common phenomenological themes.

METHODOLOGY

Existential-phenomenological psychology

The method as articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962) is philosophical and does not translate easily to concrete research. Giorgi (1985a, p.45) made this point when he posed the following questions about what is an appropriate way to employ the 'phenomenological method'. He asked:

What is a good description as opposed to a bad one? Is psychological description the same as or different from everyday descriptions? When is a description finished? What is the relationship between the question posed and the answer given in a description?...Are there any checks or guarantees that one has assumed the reductive attitude, or is it simply assumed that one can execute it if one understands what Merleau-Ponty means?

All of these questions are valid and would concern any researcher about to embark on phenomenological research.

Giorgi's (1971) work arose from his belief that psychology must develop its own methods and procedures which do not rely upon the natural sciences. He turned to the theoretical insights of existential phenomenological philosophy and endeavoured to apply these to the study of psychology. Due to the complexity of applying the phenomenological method to concrete research, Giorgi translated the phenomenological perspective into a scientific methodology. He felt this was necessary because the 'phenomenological method' as articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962) was written at a theoretical level and was thus ambiguous for concrete research.

In Giorgi's work (1985a, pp.47-52), he analysed Merleau-Ponty's four criteria of the phenomenological method and expressed these in a way

that is helpful for phenomenological psychology. These four themes will be explored.

1 Description. The first and most crucial point Giorgi (1985a, p.47) made is that when one moves from philosophy to psychology, one moves from self to others. In phenomenological psychology, the descriptions come from the subjects, as the subjects are those whose experiences are sought. He argued that this move is non-phenomenological in the true sense because phenomenology strictly interpreted depends on self evidence and the self.

2 Reduction. In phenomenological philosophy, the philosopher usually begins by bracketing her or his presuppositions before embarking upon the description. In phenomenological psychological research, however, this is not possible. Subjects describe phenomena within the natural attitude. The point Giorgi made here is that naive descriptions are accepted by subjects, and the reduction occurs when the researcher begins to analyse the descriptions (Giorgi 1985a, p.49).

Giorgi (1985a, pp.49-50) argued that within phenomenological psychology, only a partial reduction occurs, which means the object pole (noema) is reduced while the subject pole (noesis) is not. To illustrate this, he gives the example of a client who describes an early memory to his therapist. While the therapist knows from other sources that this memory is false, he nevertheless lets the client continue his elaboration. The therapist or researcher operating within the phenomenological psychological orientation would understand that the consciousness of the subject is a real process because it is this mode of human consciousness which is of interest to him or her. Within the analysis, the therapist or researcher would perform a reduction on the object (the noema)

3. Essences. Giorgi (1985a, p.50) argued that the search for essences in phenomenological psychology is similar to the search for essences within phenomenology. Free variation is still used to uncover the 'invariants' of the phenomenon. The main difference is that in phenomenological philosophy, the philosopher seeks universal invariants, while in phenomenological psychology, the psychologist seeks general essences which are context related, rather than universal. The essences or structures which are uncovered in the descriptions are general, because the meanings arrived at are more able to change due to their relationship to contexts or situations.

4. Intentionality. This final criterion pertaining to phenomenological philosophy is the notion of intentionality. Just as consciousness is always intended toward an object, in psychology, behaviour is seen as intentional and always directed towards a situation. Unlike pure consciousness, the body is given credence, and behavioural descriptions involve the body (Giorgi 1985a, p.51).

All of Giorgi's points are significant and have implications for this study. His methodological procedure has been used in a variety of psychological circles and has concentrated on clinical, social psychological, and systematic psychological inquiries (Giorgi, Fischer & Von Eckartsberg 1971, p.xii). In more recent years, qualitative nursing research (Burns and Grove 1993) has turned to Giorgi's methodology to investigate particular phenomena.

Data Collection

Data will be collected by tape-recording three semi-structured interviews with five primary school principals. Principals will be asked to describe their experience of professional development for themselves and their teachers, and asked to explore the meaning of professional development as it is experienced in their schools.

Data Analysis

It is the authors' opinion that one of the central aims of educational research is to seek meanings of educational phenomena. For this reason, phenomenological psychology will be applied to uncover the essential themes or essential structures of the phenomena under investigation. Giorgi's (1985b pp.11-19) four steps for data analysis are included below:

1Read the entire description to get a sense of the whole statement

This involves the researcher reading and re-reading the narratives from the transcribed tape recordings. These narratives describe the human experiences and consciousness of the participants in the study.

2Discrimination of meaning units within a psychological perspective and focused on the phenomenon being researched

This step involves the researcher breaking down the text into more manageable units and involves the researcher discriminating 'meaning units' with a focus on the phenomenon (Giorgi 1985b, p.11). A meaning unit is simply made up of words or phrases which clearly express a meaning which distinguishes the meaning unit from other meaning units. At this stage, the subject's language is not altered in any way.

3Transformation of the subject's everyday expressions into psychological language with emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated

For these transformations to be arrived at, the process of reflection and imaginative variation needs to occur. It is here that the researcher asks, 'What is essential in this meaning unit?'. For example, what does this meaning unit reveal about professional

development? Imaginative variation is the process which the researcher employs to determine what is essential and what is accidental.

Describing this step, Giorgi (1985b, pp.17-18) stated, 'we want to elucidate the psychological aspects in a depth appropriate for the understanding of the events'. The intent of this step is to move from subjects' concrete descriptions to more general categories. Regarding the need to transform subjects' expressions into 'psychological language', Giorgi (1985b, p.19) argued that 'we use the language of common sense enlightened by a phenomenological perspective'.

4Synthesis of transformed meaning units into a consistent statement of the structure of learning. This would include: (4a) a synthesis of situated structural descriptions and (4b) a synthesis of general structural descriptions.

Here the researcher synthesises the insights within the meaning units into a consistent description of the structure of the event. From performing steps 1, 2 and 3 for each principal, a statement describing the meaning of the professional development and their response to teachers' professional development for each principal will be written.

To arrive at a general structural description will involve synthesising

each of the five specific structural descriptions into a general structural description which represents 'the most general meaning of the phenomena' (Giorgi 1985b, p.20). As Giorgi (1985b, p.19) stated, it is necessary that all of the meaning units are implicitly contained in this general structure.

This final stage (4b) is very important in a phenomenological study because it recognises the commonalities across all of the principals' experience of professional development. While an assumption within phenomenological studies is that individuals are unique and have unique experiences, phenomenological studies are also concerned to examine the experiences of a number of subjects so that the essences or essential structures can emerge. The following quote by Eichelberger (in Patton 1990, p.70) clarified this issue:

Some researchers are misled to think that they are using a phenomenological perspective when they study four teachers and describe their four unique ways. A phenomenologist assumes a commonality in those human experiences and must use rigorously the method of bracketing to search for those commonalities.

Implementing Step 4b will ensure that the commonalities are identified and expressed and will yield the 'essential structures' of professional development.

LIMITATIONS

All research methodologies have limitations and no one methodology has all of the answers. With this thought in mind, the following discussion highlights some of the difficulties and limitations of this study.

One of the limitations of this study is that the sample is very small and therefore laws will not be yielded, nor generalisations made. The aim of phenomenological research is to understand the experiences of participants; it does not profess to generate laws. For this reason, it is believed that this study should not be judged according to the same criteria expected of positivistic research. The goal of phenomenology is reached when the reader of a phenomenological study has a better understanding of the way the subject sees things (Barritt et al., p.32). The goal of this study will be reached when the reader obtains a deeper understanding of the ways in which principals' view professional development for themselves and teachers in their school.

A second limitation of this study is that the only source of data collection is interviews. While other methods of data collection could have been employed (eg. participant observation and documentary evidence) the nature of the research question suggested that the most effective way to investigate principals' experiences of professional development was to use a series of in-depth interviews.

A third limitation of this study is the possibility of bias that may distort the interpretations of the data. To try to eliminate this bias, two specific strategies will be employed. Firstly, the notion of 'bracketing' will be used during the interview sessions and subsequent data analysis stage so that the researchers' world view will not contaminate 'the things themselves'. Secondly, follow up interviews will be conducted with each of the principals to ask them to examine the general structural description to determine if any experience has been omitted or misinterpreted. This validation process will assist in limiting possible distortions of meanings.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we began by discussing the current policy context in education which is greatly impacting upon the way professional development is being viewed. We argued that in the current climate where institutional needs are driving the agenda for professional development, principals are being identified by both policy reports and the literature as needing to play a crucial role in directing professional development.

The concern in this study is for principals to articulate the experience of professional development for themselves and their

teachers without overarching theories and worldviews dictating their experience. Phenomenology as both a philosophy and methodology was put forward as a relevant theoretical framework and methodology for this study. The Phenomenological Method as espoused by the existential phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty, was discussed. The work of Giorgi (1971; 1985a; 1985b), an existential phenomenological psychologist was referred to and his four steps for data analysis in the methodology were presented. The paper then concluded by discussing the limitations of using phenomenology as a methodology in this study.

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PRINCIPALS

AND

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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