



T1900182163

# Information Literacy

## A

# Phenomenography

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of New England. May 1996.

**Phenomenography** is a 'research specialisation aimed at the mapping of the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand various aspects of ... the world around them' (Marton 1988, p.178).

'access, to and critical use of information and of information technology is absolutely vital to lifelong learning, and accordingly no graduate - indeed no person - can be judged educated unless he or she is 'information literate...' (Candy, Crebert and O'Leary 1994, p.xii).

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## Abstract

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*Information literacy: a phenomenograph* examines the varying experience of information literacy amongst higher educators and proposes a relational model of information literacy as an alternative to the behavioural model that dominates information literacy education and research. After establishing the importance of information literacy in higher education, the metaphor of an *information literacy wheel* is used to examine problems associated with the behavioural model and to propose the adoption of a relational approach. The three spokes of the wheel analysed are descriptions of information literacy, information literacy education and research.

Following discussion of these three aspects are details of an empirical study into information users' conceptions of information literacy. The study was conducted to form an initial hub for the relational information literacy wheel - a detailed picture of the different ways in which information literacy is experienced, or conceived amongst a group of experienced information users, in this case higher educators. The resulting conceptions, represented by 'categories' describing them, provide a picture of the phenomenon of information literacy, that is a picture of information literacy as it appears to people. This picture becomes the centrepiece of the relational information literacy wheel, in the same way that lists of attributes are central to the behavioural model.

This new picture of information literacy was obtained using a phenomenographic research approach. In using this approach the study continued a tradition of merging information needs and uses and educational research. Data gathered from lecturers, librarians, counsellors and staff developers were subjected to an iterative analysis resulting in categories of description representing different conceptions of information literacy. Each category is distinguished by a particular way of focussing on the world which correlates with a particular meaning associated with information literacy. The categories represent people's subjective experience of different parts of the phenomenon which are logically related. These relationships are graphically represented in an outcome space.

The picture of information literacy derived from examining variation in users' conceptions provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and completes the proposed relational model. The outcomes also pave the way for new approaches to information literacy education and research.

**Keywords:** Information literacy, conceptions of; higher education; phenomenography; information users.

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# Acknowledgments

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The road to the completion of this study began well before I formally enrolled in a PhD in September 1993. I first became interested in information literacy in 1989 when I was designing instructional modules for postgraduate students at the Queensland University of Technology. *Advanced Information Retrieval Skills* was inspired largely by similar programs established by Nancy Fjällbrant at the Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden. In doing this work I developed a strong commitment to the importance of information literacy in the learning and research processes. At about the same time, Ference Marton, also from a Swedish university, was a visiting scholar at Griffith University. I was fortunate enough to attend a seminar where I heard both Ference and Paul Ramsden speak about an approach to student learning which I can only describe as having captured my imagination. Since then, the paths of many people have crossed mine and contributed to the commencement of my own research and to bringing it to fruition.

My combined interest in information literacy and people's different ways of seeing the world first bore fruit in a much smaller study into neophyte research students' conceptions of the literature review. While doing that early research my commitment to information literacy was fostered by Phil Candy; and my understanding of qualitative research, and phenomenography in particular, was improved through working with Rod Gerber. Both Phil and Rod formalised their interest in my research by accepting the role of supervisors to this study, for which I am deeply grateful. As I have striven to become a scholar of information literacy, rather than an advocate, they have freely given me the benefits of their wide experience and sharp insight into many aspects of my research. Their high expectations have encouraged me to go beyond what I had originally intended, and at the same time they have helped me see that the completion of this work opens up new paths that will demand to be followed.

In learning about phenomenography I am indebted to the Swedish group of phenomenographers who have answered questions, criticised, talked with me and taught me over the last few years. Lars Dahlgren, Ference Marton, Lennart Svensson and Jörgen Sandberg have helped shape my thinking about various aspects of my study. Lars Dahlgren taught me about designing data gathering strategies and about analysing interviews. Ference Marton encouraged me to follow my heart's leading and to study something that I felt passionate about. Lennart Svensson, through many hours of discussion helped me understand the views of knowledge that underpin phenomenography; and showed me that belief in a real, 'God-made', world is not incompatible with the view that knowledge of the world is constituted in terms of subject-object relations. Jörgen Sandberg has had the greatest substantive influence on my work; I have been very much inspired by his study into the meaning of competence. Although my investigation of conceptions of

information literacy has parallels with the ongoing studies of conceptions of learning, it was Jörgen's discussion of the paradigm shift involved in taking a phenomenographic approach to competence that helped me clarify my contribution to information literacy theory.

The great interest in information literacy which is evident all over the world has kept me convinced of the value of this study. At home, and through out Queensland, I have been offered opportunities to work at the coalface with students and staff, and to share this research with interested colleagues who have provided much feedback. I am particularly grateful to Janice Rickards for inviting me to develop the Griffith University Information Literacy Blueprint to Margaret Appleton for inviting me to conduct workshops for lecturers and librarians at the Central Queensland University, and to many colleagues in the Queensland Branch of the Library and Information Association who have invited me to speak at seminars on information literacy and research. Other friends in the information literacy movement from Singapore, South Africa, England and the United States have kept me thinking about practical issues in information literacy education through lively e-mail correspondence. I am also much indebted to the South Australian Forum for Information Literacy for hosting national information literacy conferences which have allowed me to bring work in progress before a wider audience and for making it possible for me to meet many people whom I would otherwise only know through electronic letter writing.

My greatest thanks must go to my family for tolerating my commitment to this research and the necessary outcomes in the form of a thesis. Although I am not by nature a social animal I have hibernated more than usual in the last three years. Special thanks go to my mother, Maureen Morel, for graciously volunteering to edit the final work. My husband, Neil, has provided more than tolerance. He has provided active support without which this thesis could never have been completed. He has cooked meals, watched with me late at night, diagnosed computer faults at impossibly early hours in the morning, fixed printers, drawn diagrams and generally continued to believe that the study was worthwhile whenever I lost sight of its value. He has even enthusiastically participated in midnight discussions about questions that seemed important at the time, such as whether there was an intentional relationship between a teapot and a cup.

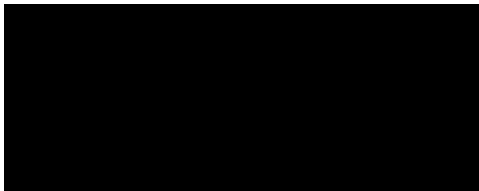
Mentioned last, but most important, are the many people who contributed to the empirical work central to this thesis. The final outcomes were possible only because of the generosity of those who devoted substantial amounts of time to talking with me, or writing, about their views of information literacy. Although I will never know who all of them were, I am sincerely grateful.

Christine Susan Bruce



I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



10th May 1996.

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