Using Phenomenography to Bridge the Gap between Research and Practice

This paper will show how phenomenographic studies can be used to inform library practice using three different studies as examples. Phenomenography as a research approach is concerned with identifying the qualitatively different ways in which people experience a given phenomenon (Marton, 1981). Phenomenography is a useful research method for bridging the gap between research and practice and for its potential to utilize research outcomes in practice due to its exploration of peoples' experiences. For instance, in teaching and learning, the perceptions and experiences of core subject concepts held by students can be revealed through phenomenographic inquiry and used to tailor and improve instruction around those concepts. The paper will outline students' and faculty members' experiences of library services and resources and the practical implications concerning how library services could be changed or improved based on these experiences.

Three different phenomenographic studies were undertaken by the researchers looking at: how English Foreign Language (EFL) students experience information literacy, how faculty members experience the library and how online faculty members experience open access. Each yields practical implications. For example, in the case of scholarly communication it was found that faculty members who teach online have different perceptions of the value of open access for sharing knowledge with fellow scholars. With this awareness of their experiences, this knowledge can be used to develop more effective and targeted materials that educate faculty on the benefits of publishing and sharing materials through open access channels. One example of how research can be used to inform information literacy practice from the study on EFL students is in relation to how language impacts information behavior. It was found that EFL students faced many challenges with word comprehension when searching for and reading information and that language impacts on what resources they choose. Librarians can develop materials or activities that will be beneficial to EFL/ESL students struggling with word comprehension and a lack of vocabulary, especially when dealing with new topics. In order to assist these students, librarians can prepare keyword lists on topics that students will be researching or lists of synonyms, definitions or translations of more difficult vocabulary or develop activities that assist students with learning how to use synonyms and translators effectively when searching for information.

Evidence from the study on faculty members' experiences of academic libraries revealed six qualitatively distinctive types of experience and has been used to inform practice through the improvement of user surveys and questionnaire design to assess library usage and services by faculty. The ways faculty used the library were revealed in the research and had not been preconceived by the original questionnaire. These improved instruments enable broader data gathering on the prevalence of certain types and purposes of library usage among faculty. The findings of the studies show that based on users' experiences, there are a number of library services and resources such as collection development, information literacy instruction, reference services, web design, and scholarly communication where research results can be applied to improve practice.

References

Marton, F. (1981). Phenomenography - describing conceptions of the world around us. *Instructional Science*, Vol.10, No. 2, 177 – 200.