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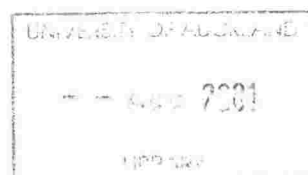
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TEACHER-LEARNERS' CONCEPTIONS
OF LEARNING: THE IMPACTS OF
FURTHER FORMAL STUDY

ALAN FRANK CLIFF

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports the results of a longitudinal study of the conceptions of their own learning of a group of educators ($n = 14$) involved in further formal study at graduate level. Previous studies of conceptions of learning from the perspective of the learner him/herself have been conducted in a wide variety of contexts. This present study was an attempt to explore this phenomenon from the perspective of a group of New Zealand educators individually representing early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors. The study had two aims: (1) the exploration of the phenomenon of learning conception at different points during and after these educators' engagement in graduate study; and (2) the investigation of change and stability in these learning conceptions, as well as those academic context features that might be said to be associated with that change or stability.

The current study was substantively based on previous descriptive classifications of learning conception, derived from a phenomenographic methodology. Abstract classifications of learning conception using phenomenography have typically identified two discrete categories of conception, namely quantitative and qualitative conceptions. These categorisations have been viewed as hierarchically related to one another. The present study was directed towards the exploration of maximal variation in learning conception amongst this particular group of educators.

Findings from this study suggest that there are complex inter-relationships between quantitative and qualitative conceptions, and that these conceptions are constitutive of

cognitive, affective, social and moral dimensions. Furthermore, the findings suggest that change in conception is most powerfully influenced by courses in which course presenters adopt radical approaches towards content, methodology and assessment. However, change in conception does not necessarily result in change to these educators' professional practice.

The conclusion to this thesis addresses the extent to which findings from this study might be said to be unique to this group of learners as adult learners. The conclusion also suggests that the manner in which learners' conceptions are viewed may be influenced by the particular paradigmatic view that the researcher adopts in exploring the phenomenon. Finally, the study concludes that the degree to which change in conception might be said to be long-lasting depends upon the relationship between the learning context and the work context in which the particular learners are operating.

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