Abstract

How students learn about network protocols is studied in a project-centred, internationally distributed, university course in computer systems taught jointly by two universities. Insights into students' understanding of basic concepts within computer networks are gained through an empirical phenomenographic research approach.

The use of phenomenography as a research approach makes it possible to learn about computer science, as it is experienced by the students. The context in which the research is carried out and issues concerning by whom the context is experienced, are investigated and form a part of the methodological basis.

Students' understanding of some protocols that are used within the project, as well as their experience of the general concept of network protocols are investigated, and different ways of experiencing the protocols are discerned. Some aspects that indicate good learning outcomes are identified, such as being capable of understanding a protocol in different ways and of making relevant choices between the ways it could be experienced according to the context in which it appears.

Based on these results a discussion on learning and teaching is developed. It is argued that a variation in the context in which the protocol is experienced promotes good learning, since different ways of experiencing a protocol are useful with different tasks to hand. A student with a good understanding of network protocols can choose in a situationally relevant way between different ways of experiencing a protocol.
Acknowledgements

First I wish to thank my supervisors: Shirley Booth, Chalmers University of Technology, who has supported me throughout the process that has led to this thesis, and who has introduced me to educational research and phenomenography. Lars Asplund, Uppsala University, has coached and guided me through the first part of this project, while Arnold Pears, Uppsala University, has been my support towards the completion of this thesis.

My research project would not have been possible without the students, who have shared their experiences of participating in the Runestone course with me. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your help.

My work on this thesis has been financed by a doctoral studentship from The Knowledge Foundation of Sweden's research programme "Learning and IT", for which I am grateful. The Runestone project has been financed by the Council for the Renewal of Higher Education and NyIng (a project to renew engineering programs). Support has also been received from Uppsala University.
This thesis is based on two publications, written between 2001 and 2002.


Comments on my participation:

**Paper A:** I alone did the work preceding the publication as well as the writing. I discussed my work and my writing during the whole process with my supervisors.

**Paper B:** I have participated equally with the other authors in the work preceding the publication and in the writing. The empirical data that is referred to stems from an on-going research project by Tom Adawi. Shirley Booth brought an understanding of the theoretical foundations of phenomenography into the project.
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