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TITLE: Challenging Normative Assumptions Regarding Disengaged Youth: A Phenomenological Perspective

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This presentation explores the experiences of twelve young people, all teenagers, who have chosen to attend alternative schools known as Flexible Learning Options within the Australian context. Using a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to understand their experiences outside the normalized public discourse that they had 'disengaged' from mainstream school. The phenomenological approach is employed because of its potential to draw attention to predetermined assumptions about, in this study's case, student disengagement which commonly attend to the student and their life circumstance from a deficit perspective. The study gives evidence for the utility of a phenomenological approach in providing insight into how macrosystem policy, such as nationalistic neo-liberal agenda, influences 'schooling', and subsequently students' experiences with schools. The implications of this study with attention to the nexus between methodology and policy are discussed, especially in drawing attention to how phenomenology as a qualitative methodology provides a means of agency for the insubordinate in challenging existing policy and public assumption.