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Transnational Teaching: Evaluating the Application of Heideggerian Phenomenology and IPA in a Study of Lived Experiences

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Abstract

Transnational education has increased over the past decade for multiple reasons. Higher education institutions driven by a need to increase non-governmental funding and the concept of higher education as a commodity, have combined to cause many institutions to extend their activities into the field of transnational education partnerships. To ensure the survival of these strategic alliances, teaching faculty are required to service the commodity being exported from the UK. This unique study uses this context to evaluate the application of Heideggerian phenomenology and IPA as a means of analyzing the *lived experiences* of academic practitioners and the effects on their *being*. The study concludes that Heideggerian philosophical thought provides an insightful lens when combined with IPA, by providing access to an individual's personal perception of events as opposed to other methodologies that simply attempt to produce an objective account of the event itself. Two vignettes from the data exemplify how the approach can help us understand participant *lived experiences* in a given context, as well as documenting the wider benefits of applying this approach in other studies that concern the *lived experiences* of individuals.

Keywords

phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, qualitative evaluation, transcendental phenomenology

Introduction

Internationalization and its impact on higher education (HE) is certainly not a new phenomenon, growing over the years in its importance, impact, and complexity (Knight, 2008). All over the world, universities are now finding themselves operating in increasingly international and global environments, consequently increasing competition in the higher education sector. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are now increasingly concerned with securing and strengthening their positions by generating alternative education services, which offer diversity and create greater stability in planning. Transnational higher education (TNE) therefore represents one way of accomplishing this, while also driving HEI internationalization agendas. TNE arrangements enable students to study for a degree, provided by a foreign HEI, without them having to leave their home country. However, certain partnerships do offer overseas study experiences should students wish to take the opportunity to journey overseas for a period of the degree program. Consequently, TNE arrangements are complex requiring significant investment, infrastructure, and resourcing.

The role played by academic staff members or teaching faculty (TF) in these initiatives cannot be overstated, since they play a critical role in the development of relations between partners (Bordogna, 2019). TF may be involved in a variety of functions, from participating in reconnaissance missions, offering administrative and/or recruitment support, or traveling to teach. Teaching may require TF to operate as "flying faculty" traveling from the awarding institution to deliver modules in intensive teaching blocks (K. Smith, 2013, 2014). Moreover, through teaching overseas, TF experience a host of emotions that can influence their decision-making processes,

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teaching ability and fundamentally affect their sense of self-awareness and confidence (Szkornik, 2017).

This investigation therefore sought to explore and analyze the *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) of nine TF who regularly traveled to China to teach as part of a transnational arrangement. Through gaining an insider's perspective (Conrad, 1987), the aim was to explore how TF think and feel about their experiences, and what they recall as being significant to them and why. It is argued herein that the application of Heideggerian phenomenological thought, combined with IPA (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), is a powerful tool in providing rich insights into any *lived experience*. The rationale for wishing to access the personal world of TF who teach overseas is because, for a variety of reasons, these experiences often leave TF feeling emotional and contemplative about their character, often questioning their identity as teachers who can inspire students. Emphasis is placed upon the fact that this study is unique in its application of Heidegger and IPA, since neither have been applied to this degree, in this context before. Furthermore, the aim is to evaluate the benefit of combining this philosophy and methodology in a study of other *lived experience.*

Five aspects of Heidegger's (1962) philosophy (documented in *Being and Time*) were applied. These are outlined in the section entitled "Philosophical and Methodological" approach. Initially, this paper starts by exploring some relevant literature concerning international teaching, before detailing the study's philosophical and methodological application. Finally, two vignettes from the findings are used to evaluate the application of Heideggerian phenomenology and IPA in terms of the learning it generates for this particular study, but also the wider implications of applying this philosophy and methodology in generic studies concerning the *lived experiences* of individuals.

Academic Staff Member Experiences of International Teaching

Few studies focus specifically on TF who work overseas as part of a transnational arrangement in Asia, especially in China. Yet there are multiple studies that focus upon general staff experiences of international work and how it makes them think and feel. These studies range in their methodological approaches, with many utilizing qualitative methods, some phenomenological, revolving around two central topics. The first topic concentrates on staff members who have participated in exchange programs (Slethaug, 2007), international fieldwork programs (Simonelis et al., 2011) or fly-in fly-out teaching (Bordogna, 2017; Jais et al., 2015). The second focuses on educators who have lived overseas as expatriates, living, and working in an Asian country for a year or more (Melby et al., 2008). Since the purpose of this study are the *lived experiences* of TF who work overseas for short periods, this will be the area of focus. Furthermore, qualitative studies, and those with a particular leaning toward phenomenology are discussed, since it is the value of this methodology in relation to these overseas experiences that this paper seeks to examine.

Research conducted by Enskär, Johansson, Ljusegern, and Widang, (2011) took a phenomenological approach, in which twenty-six practitioners were asked to describe their experiences while participating in overseas exchanges. They noted how the program provided educators with reflective time, and allowed them to become more aware of themselves, thus leading to an "increase in self-confidence and self-esteem" (p. 543), a theme reflected by Sandgren et al. (1999). Overall Enskär et al. (2011) discovered that many traveling academics had positive experiences, but that these experiences required educators to have "... an open-minded approach ... as well as support from the organisation involved" (p. 544).

Similarly, Simonelis et al. (2011) worked with both students and lecturers, who were recruited to participate in an international fieldwork placement in Trinidad and Tobago. Phenomenological methods were utilized, and fourteen participants interviewed. The data showed how international opportunities allowed both staff and students to develop their professional knowledge. Rapport building and negotiation (Lynam, 1992) were also documented as important and essential for the development of collaborative work between participants. More recent work by Ospina and Lopera Medina (2020) investigated the personal experiences, benefits, and challenges of international teaching experiences. Findings resonate with other studies, whereby participants became more mature, flexible, and developed a deeper understanding of themselves as people through having engaged in these overseas experiences.

K. Smith (2013) sought to investigate the lived experiences of five lecturers who were part of a "flying faculty" arrangement with institutions based in the Middle and Far East. Utilizing a biographical-narrative-interpretative model (BNIM) rather than phenomenology, she explored the impact of flying faculty visits on "academic practice, transformational learning and professional development" (p. 136). The methodological approach enabled her to gather rich, contextual detail that made teaching experiences, which are often hidden, visible. Moreover, her work highlights how faculty members often deal with the challenges of overseas work by themselves, without institutional support. Her participants are captured sharing their thoughts on cultural differences, teaching adaptations and self-awareness. It is this insight that the application of phenomenology in this paper seeks to expand upon and develop.

It is worth noting that it is not just literature concerning staff that can help inform our understandings of being overseas. Student experiences of studying overseas are well documented (Ruddock & Turner, 2007). Although this does not concern TF directly, the concept of traveling overseas to another culture and adaptation is central to all studies. Educational trips overseas, regardless of whether undertaken by a student or by an educator, involve making transitions that can generate both positive and negative outcomes (Green et al., 2008).

Cushner and Mahon (2002) studied student teachers in the USA and the impact that international experiences had on the professional and personal development of new teachers. They concluded that cross-cultural immersion encourages students to "stretch beyond their traditional comfort zone" (p. 47).

It increases cultural knowledge, broadens perspectives, increases the belief in the value of multi-cultural education and allows relationships between different people to flourish (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). It can reduce a person's ethnocentrism (Bennett, 1986) and use of negative stereotypes. Although not directly concerning TF, the findings resonate with the literature on overseas teaching experiences. Notwithstanding how these studies resonate with Heidegger's philosophy of understanding. Encountering differences creates a shift toward ways of knowing that extend beyond our current understanding, making new ones possible, thus representing a form of hermeneutic engagement (Gadamer, 1975). Based upon these notions, it seems fair to suggest that a Heideggerian phenomenological philosophy, coupled with a methodology that aims to understand "the significance of practical activities in our everyday lives" (Plager, 1994, p. 81), is appropriate in a study of overseas teaching experiences.

Throughout the literature, concepts of understanding others and oneself, acceptance, openness, self-awareness, adaptability, and self-reflection represent insightful findings that help us to understand how individuals navigate and survive in international settings. Although these investigations shed light on the way individuals develop from engaging in these types of overseas experiences, this study seeks to expand upon this knowledge by engaging a more comprehensive existential philosophy and analytical technique to see what transpires. The aim is to discover *how* (overseas teaching) experiences shape the essence of a person, and how this enriches them both internally and externally, outside of the classroom environment.

New ontological explorative questions are therefore posited. For example, what are the existential concerns of individuals who are affected by this phenomenon? Does this phenomenon change a person's sense of identity? How do people make sense of what is happening to them? It is argued that Heideggerian phenomenology combined with IPA can assist in the generation of insightful answers to these questions that have perhaps otherwise been lacking in previous studies. This combination is considered invaluable in generating research findings, which firstly showcase to other researchers the value of Heidegger and IPA in a study of phenomenon that requires the production of an intelligible lived experience; and secondly, in providing HEIs with insights to guide them in the development of infrastructure that better supports traveling TF.

Philosophical and Methodological Approach

In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger was primarily concerned with the primordial ontological question of what it means to *be* a person and *how* the world is intelligible to us (Gelven, 1989; Leonard, 1994; Crotty, 1996), as opposed to epistemological questions of how we know what we know. The context of transnational teaching thus provides the background for exploring ontological questions regarding how certain *lived experiences* influence a person's *being*.

However, first to comprehend and appreciate Heideggerian phenomenology and its relevance/ application to this study, five essential facets of what it means to *be* a person must be understood (Leonard, 1994). This is not to suggest these aspects solely define Heidegger's work. However, in the context of this study it is these five facets that have been examined and applied in the anticipation of using them to explore the *lived experiences* of TF:

1. **The first facet** of a person centers on the relationship of the person to the world (Leonard, 1994). Heidegger represented this in his use of the term *being-in-the-world.* World, to Heidegger is a meaningful set of cultures, practices, relationships, languages, and skills (Plager, 1994) that Dasein is "*thrown*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 174) into by virtue of being born into a culture. World is thus a priori. It is the already existing skills and practices which we share and depend for meaning and intelligibility. This means that Dasein can live in a subworld (*being-in-a-situation*) based upon its activity, while also being in a shared situation, also known as the "clearing," being-in-clearing is *being-there* (Dreyfus, 1991).

World to Heidegger is seen as "all-pervasive as to be overlooked by persons" (Leonard, 1994, p. 49). It only appears to us in a conscious way when we stop, critically reflect, and question our situation, our behaviors and actions. Heidegger (1962) calls the mode of *Being* that originates from our *average everydayness* (in which we actively engage with practical projects with no need for focal awareness of our tools or ourselves) the *ready-to-hand*. These are *taken-for-granted*, and we are simply unaware of their existence (Packer, 1985). This mode discloses the "most primordial and direct access to human phenomena" (Packer, 1985, p. 1084) because it is the mode of direct practical engagement in which we do most of our everyday living. To Heidegger, this amounts to the same as describing *human being*; as this being is itself a practical activity, rather than a special kind of entity or a formal predicate (Heidegger, 1962; Packer, 1985). Hermeneutic interpretation focuses on this mode of engagement and on the *unready-to-hand* mode. This mode is entered when we find our skilled coping is temporarily disturbed. Activities are disrupted and frustration arises (Plager, 1994). It is then that we realize something of the nature of existence since our experience of it has changed, meaning it becomes salient in a way that is not visible in the *ready-to-hand* mode.

The *present-at-hand* mode is commonly known as theoretical knowing and only entered when we detach ourselves from on-going practical involvement in a project at hand. On such occasions we "stand back," reflect upon the situation, or contemplate an object for its various material or chemical properties. This mode allows scientific experimentation and observations to take place. Entities now have their own independent reality, whereby they become endowed with discrete and definite measurable properties (Packer, 1985). However, most of our experience of the world is engaging with entities in the *ready-to-hand* mode.

2. **The second** facet of a person is that a person is a *being* for whom things have *significance and value* (Heidegger, 1962). In Heidegger's view of the world, things play an integral part in the world and things have significance based upon the type of world we live in. In everyday terms, we comprehend ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of. Things therefore matter, either as threatening, stubborn, useful, and so forth and this mattering creates further reflection and evaluation. Moreover, these things matter in different ways depending on the world in which a Dasein is *thrown.* To really understand the values and significance attached by a person to a situation, a researcher must really study that person *in context* (Koch, 1995; Adolfsson, 2010) or the significance of things may change. However, in the context of this research, this was deemed impossible due to financial and time constraints associated with overseas travel but was reflected upon throughout data collection.
3. **The third and fourth facet** is that persons are self-interpreting and embodied. Nothing can be encountered independent of our background understandings. Every encounter is an interpretation based on our background. Furthermore, the phenomenological view is that rather than having a body, we are *embodied*, and this is fundamentally different to the Cartesian notion of the body as an object of possession (Leder, 1984). Our bodies provide the possibility for the concrete action of self in the world. This facet explores the notion that we are beings with a mind-body unity and have the ontological capacity to be in situations in *meaningful* ways. It is the body that first grasps the world and moves with intention in that meaningful world.
4. **The fifth facet** considers *being-in-time.* Heideggerian phenomenology posits temporality as being constitutive of being. According to Adolfsson (2010), *Being* is influenced by the past, present and future and these three distinct time frames are connected. Temporality is important to *Dasein* and *being-in-time* cannot be studied except within the context of *time*, by which it is constituted. Where we are and how we feel about a phenomenon, can be directly affected by these three different time perspectives (Adolfsson, 2010).

As well as the facets, Heidegger (1962) also refers to the hermeneutic *circle of understanding* in which the three-fold *fore-structure of interpretation* plays an essential role (Dreyfus, 1991). Heidegger considered descriptions of experiences to be impossible without interpretation, believing "that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 61). This interpretation is fundamental to our understanding of the meaning of Being as hermeneutic, designating it to be an interpretivist process rather than a descriptive one (Leonard, 1994). Heidegger argued that interpretation is "grounded in something we have in advance *fore-having* . . . we see in advance *fore-sight* . . . and something we grasp in advance *fore—conception*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 191). Dreyfus (1991) elaborates on this by stating all interpretations start with an individual's "Vorhabe" (p. 199)—a *fore-having*. This background creates an interpretation on how to approach the situation, a perspective on how to undertake the interpretation—*fore sight*. Finally, the *fore-conception* is the expectation the individual already has as to what he/she will discover. Koch (1995) argues that these *fore-structures* relate to the understanding of *Being* and cannot be eliminated, forgotten of bracketed. As Heidegger explained, "whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon *fore-having, fore-sight* and *fore-conception*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 193).

These five facets and *circle of understanding* of explicated in Table 1 and form the basis of data analysis.

Applying Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

To realize a phenomenon from a Heideggerian perspective, hermeneutic analysis is arguably the most accepted form of evaluation (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Here we see IPA as being a credible methodology since a major theoretical underpinning of IPA comes from hermeneutics because it is concerned with the implementation of the hermeneutic circle—a critical component of Heidegger's philosophy.

In everyday terms, the interpretation of a text involves engaging in a dialog with something new (the text) and something old (a *fore-having*). There is a dynamic relationship between "the whole" and "part of" the text. Words only make sense when examined in relation to the context of the whole sentence, yet, conversely, the meaning of a sentence depends upon "the cumulative meanings of individual words" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). Thus, IPA maintains the researcher move back and forth between their texts to reflect and interpret meaning on several different levels. It does this through a five-stage iterative process of: reading/re-reading, noting, developing emerging themes, connections, patterns, and next cases, to makes sense of the data collected. IPA is not only useful because of its detailed examination of human *lived experiences*, but because it encourages researchers to be flexible, empathetic, and willing to listen to their participant's world. IPA encourages the researcher to seek out themes by using key words to capture the essential quality of what is being induced from the data. It further inspires the researcher to look for connections between the themes and cluster them together to create superordinate concepts (J. A. Smith et al., 1999). All texts collected herein were subject to five-stage IPA, with Table 1 being used as a "thinking tool" for the purposes of inspiring a Heideggerian form of analysis in relation to themes, connections, and patterns.

It must be noted however that no world can ever be known completely (Dreyfus, 1991) and that worlds are not objects that can be frozen in time (Benner, 1994). These worlds are also subject to the researchers *fore-structure* whereby researcher

Table 1. Facets of Heideggerian Phenomenology.

Heideggerian Facets		Explications
Person in the World	Background-*thrownness already always situated* (Benner, 1985; Koch, 1995; Rapport, 2005) *Pre-understanding* (Koch, 1995) *Being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 1962; Mackey, 2005) *Ready-to-hand (taken-for-granted)* *Unready-to-hand.* *Present-to-hand*	World meaningful set of relationships, practice, and language. Shared backgrounds and familiarity. Unconsciousness/obliviousness. Distortion/conflict. Breakdown and reflection. Observation/experimentation. Theoretical knowing.
Person for whom Things have Significance and Value	Understand ourselves and our existence by the activities we pursue and the things we take care of (Heidegger, 1962)	The things we care for. Things show up as *mattering.* In context. Directed.
Person as Self-interpreting	Nothing can be encountered independent of our background understanding (Leonard, 1994; Heidegger, 1962)	Interpretation based on background.
Person as Embodied	Subject and object exist together (Merleau-Ponty, 2001; Leonard, 1994)	Meaningful engagement. Moving with intention in that meaningful world.
Person in Time	*Past* (Adolfsson, 2010) *Present* (Adolfsson, 2010) *Future* (Adolfsson, 2010)	Influence perspectives. Care. Understanding limitation of time. Value of time. Belonging somewhere.
The Circle of Understanding	Interpretation (Benner, 1994) *Fore-structure—three-fold* (Heidegger, 1962; Dreyfus, 1991)	Human beings are self-interpreting. Reflection on meanings through language, culture, and history. Acts of interpretation. Understanding is rooted in our own definitions. *Fore-having—taken-for-granted* backgrounds. *Fore-sight*—approaching the problem. *Fore-conception*—expectations set in advance.

backgrounds create the possibility of an interpretive foreground; therefore, researcher reflexivity and documentation is critical throughout the research process.

Sample Selection, the Interview Process, and Ethics

The sample consisted of nine participants with the following selection criteria applied:

1. That their UK program had a transnational arrangement in China.
2. That they had/did physically traveled/travel overseas to service that arrangement in China.

Table 2. Participant Details and Course Type.

Name (Pseudonym)	Course Type
Tina	Logistics and operations
Cath	Healthcare
Kevin	Education
Margaret	Hospitality
Sean	Health care
Steve	Management
Blossom	Education
Sally	Management
Jean	Healthcare

The rationale for nine participants was based on the work of Benner (1994), supported by J. A. Smith et al. (2009) and can be viewed in Table 2. Both Benner (1994) and Smith et al., (2009) argue that sample size in IPA studies can be small and limited, depending on the amount of text generated and the number of researchers available to analyze the texts once they have been transcribed. Benner (1994) argues a small sample that produces a large amount of text that is clear and methodical, is more reliable and plausible than a large sample that provides inadequate information and poor texts. British Educational Research Association (2018) Ethical Guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

To further create and retain research credibility and authenticity, all participants were subject to the same semistructured hermeneutic interview (Rapport, 2005), enabling access to their everyday lived experience in the narrative form. Interview questions were uncomplicated and included questions on the participant's background, thoughts and experiences, interpretations of teaching overseas, and most importantly *meaning* derived from these experiences. All interviews ran for approximately 90 min, were recorded, and transcribed into texts.

Findings and Discussion

The following section provides two vignettes from the findings that evidence the value of applying Heideggerian philosophy realized through an IPA methodology. Since not all five essential facets can be commented upon herein (Table 1), it is important to note this does not mean any facet is less important when applying the philosophy or analyzing the texts. The two facets utilized were chosen simply because they generated interesting insights for the purposes of this paper.

Vignette 1: TF as Persons-in-the-World With Fore-Structures

Initially, transcripts were explored to understand participant histories, and perceptions of self. These insights allowed the researcher to get a sense of their background *thrownness*. Firstly, there was a synergy between all the participants in terms of the type of person they considered themselves to be:

> I'm a person that really doesn't like to be pigeonholed . . . I'm a bit of a culture-vulture; I like to see what other people do. (Cath)

> I tend to be quite optimistic, so I looked on the positives. I'm never going to go to China if I don't go now . . . and it's only 3 weeks. (Blossom)

Common themes that emerged relating to perceptions of self, included: A desire to explore, challenge, develop self-awareness (Sandgren et al., 1999), embrace once-in-a-life-time chances, a passion to explore beyond the self and a desire to learn and develop. These notions concur with the work of Furuta et al. (2003), who highlight the importance of "flexibility and a sense of adventure" (p. 145) when working in new cultural environments. While Sandgren et al. (1999), Furuta et al. (2003), and Enskär et al. (2011) all mention open-mindedness and acceptance as being key to successful international experiences, they make no reference to how educators who travel overseas perceive themselves beforehand, and the effect this may have on their ability to interpret their situation and cope once abroad.

Exploring backgrounds and perceptions of self was important, because it clearly helped participants interpret and process their international teaching commitments. By asking the participants to describe themselves, it became possible to explore their apparent *fore-having*, and their possible *fore-sight* and *fore-conception*. Heidegger (1962) argues we interpret a phenomenon based upon our *fore-structure*, whereby our interpretation changes as we engage in an experience that is outside of our local practical context (Koch, 1995). Reflection was evident in most participants, where they were experiencing something for the first time and trying to make sense of it in relation to their background and history. The more their experiences were shared, the deeper their self-analysis, and realization of the significance of their journey on their sense of self. The experiences seemingly created new levels of enlightenment that was seen by all as a blessing in retrospect, but were not always, at the time, considered so favorably:

> I think on a personal level it broadens your horizons, broadens your experiences . . . when I went out in June, I didn't realize, I had no idea how it was going to go . . . it was a bit of an experiment . . . then I thought "I enjoyed this, I wouldn't mind doing more of this . . . ." (Jean)

All participants seemed confident in being able to handle and interpret international challenges because they all considered themselves as being naturally intrinsically forward thinking and adaptable. Two of the participants had previous experiences of living and working as expatriates overseas, Sean and Steve. For example, Steve specifically commented upon his time living and working in the Middle East. This meant he had developed a *fore-having* that enabled him to interpret and understand the requirements of teaching overseas differently to the other participants. From this it became apparent that his *fore-sight* and *fore-conception* would therefore be slightly different to the other participants.

However, what became apparent in the seven remaining interviews, was that the task of overseas teaching was not always as readily understood. A shift in interview tonality became apparent as participants switched from the presumed *ready-to-hand* to *unready-to-hand* modes of engagement. Even though all were very experienced, qualified teaching professionals (*fore-having*) whereby teaching was an everyday taken-for-granted activity, this seemed to provide them with little reassurance when faced with a foreign teaching environment. This switch, caused by a change in the participants' usual circumstance, disrupted their usual mode of operation. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) would call this trigger "culture shock" and it activated the *unready-to-hand* mode:

> I think one of the first things that crossed my mind, as I was walking back, was I haven't seen one Asian person here, then I thought wait a minute, these could be my students, then they probably have never met anybody as tall as me, how would they take to me . . . they probably have never met someone like me, an Asian person with a beard. (Kevin)

Kevin speaks of being an Asian (Indian) man. His usual way of engaging with people and understanding himself seemed suddenly to become a *concern* for him (Garson, 2005). The environmental change thus initiated a change in his perception. He now started to recognize something of his nature (Packer,

1985). His usual mode of engagement was seemingly distorted, meaning that his self-awareness heightened. Bennett (1986) mentions that to enable full integration with another culture, a person must construct a multicultural identity. Yet this can only happen in the *unready-to-hand* mode of engagement, whereby the individual considers their nature and sense of identity because they are now *consciously* aware of it.

Kevin was not the only one to move from the *ready-to-hand* to *unready-to-hand*. Blossom, Sally and Tina all shared insights that evidenced a heightened awareness of difference:

> I had no idea, no idea what it [overseas teaching] entailed . . . I didn't know that at the time . . . I just thought "this cannot be normal" but I thought it was, I didn't know any different, it was difficult . . . . (Blossom)

> I didn't know what I didn't know, I was you know, almost unconsciously incompetent about what was going to happen. It was only when I got there that I realized. (Sally)

Packer (1985) argues that our experience changes as we become aware of distortion. In this instance, our preconceived assumptions based upon our own understanding of the world breaks down. This breakdown causes a conscious appreciation of our experience. This consciousness creates reflection and realization, which in turn challenge and change our perspectives of ourselves and understanding of the world (Sandgren et al., 1999). In this instance, participants began to interpret their experiences, and describe emotions they had never connected with teaching previously, such as shock, confusion, and incompetency. These emotions were certainly problematic for those with whom teaching was seen to be a key part of their identity, whereby their experiences seemed to prompt feelings of inadequacy, never felt before.

Vignette 2: TF for Whom Things Have Significance and Value

Findings suggest that having previous experience of developing teaching materials and schedules is vitally important to TF, particularly in the first instance, where no prior overseas teaching experience exists. Although some had researched Asian learning cultures, it seemed methodical and detailed teaching preparation, storage, and transportation was the only way they could establish authority and deal with any potential threats to their personal integrity:

> We sent everything over electronically for it to be printed out, but I had a hardcopy of everything, I don't trust other people where my teaching's concerned! but it was good that I did, because when I got there the photocopies were on used paper sothey'd actually copied my slides onto used paper, so they weren't very clear at all . . . that was a bit of a shock really. (Blossom)

Sally, by perceiving herself as a "planner" was also able to cope with the anxiety of teaching in a new environment:

> I had to plan. I felt to have some credibility with the audience I was about to engage with, I'd have to demonstrate I could teach . . . so I engaged in a lot of prep that perhaps I would not normally have done in this country. (Sally)

In the case of Blossom and Cath, careful planning also seemed to reassure them that whatever teaching environment they faced, they could use this perception of self to maintain a sense of control:

> I'd done loads of preparation . . . every lesson I prepared for . . . I did a scheme of work, I did lesson plans, I did all of that immaculately. (Blossom)

> I feel confident teaching when I know what I am talking about . . . so I put it all on the desktop of a laptop and I prepped for quite a while. I then took it with me, and I did a bit on the plane as well, to make sure. (Cath)

The time spent creating teaching materials, and the way in which participants expressed extreme care for artifacts such as USB sticks and folders, by carrying them on their personage, suggests these items held huge significance. They *showed up as mattering*, helping TF to feel safe in uncharted waters, whereby normal domestic teaching conditions were removed. These artifacts therefore represented a form of reassurance that perhaps would have held less significance in their usual teaching environments where technology and teaching systems were inherent.

Overseas teaching seemed to both disturb and/or excite the participants. Seven questioned their capabilities and qualifications to perform the task, sharing feelings of anxiety that was unfamiliar to them when teaching in their normal environment. Sean and Steve seemed more confident based upon their previous overseas experiences. However, all participants relied on their *fore-sight* to reassure themselves. Their previous experiences of teaching and the importance of preparation, enabled them all to develop coping mechanisms, thereby facilitating newfound confidences within them. In Heideggerian terms, this *fore-sight* gave them the capability to manage unplanned events and cope with the emotions created by shifting between the *ready* to *unready* modes of engagement.

Other things that *showed up as mattering* to TF related to the operational nuances surrounding participant's overseas teaching experiences:

> The group size was about a hundred and thirty-five, we could not fit everyone in one room . . . it was mainly lectures as opposed to doing anything more interactive. (Tina)

> It was quite a big contract . . . three lecturers go out for every single month for 12 months. (Kevin)

These descriptions made it easier to observe patterns in participant concerns and characterize which operational issues mattered staff. Things that would usually be taken-for-granted were now distorted creating a new consciousness and appreciation of situations. Themes that emerged that caused concern to

participants were student numbers, resources of the partner colleges, teaching hours, travel arrangements, visa applications, the proximity of hotels to colleges, the administrative support in colleges, the size of programs, duration, and the preparation time available before leaving the UK. Furthermore, it became possible to see patterns in TF responses when dealing with these concerns. Many cited their character and previous experiences, as enabling them to develop strategies for coping in unchartered territory.

The learning herein is that "perceptions of self" as being optimistic and flexible, coupled with previous teaching experience are vital in developing a *fore-having* that can assist in the creation of an advantageous *fore-sight* and *fore-conception* when teaching overseas. Notwithstanding how these states can help alleviate the stress created when shifting between the *ready* and *unready-to-hand* modes of engagement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to use transnational teaching as a context in which to evaluate the application of Heidegger's thinking combined with IPA as a means of analyzing the lived experiences of a small number of TF. Heideggerian philosophy provides an interesting lens for unearthing new insights into how a phenomenon can make a person feel, think, reflect, and believe. When it comes to investigations that seek to address deep psychological questions, it is argued herein that Heidegger's philosophy, when combined with IPA, are useful in unearthing findings where other traditions and methodologies may struggle. Thus, it is advised that researchers seeking to address ontological research questions, in particular research contexts, such as: What is this experience like for a person? How does this experience change a person's sense of identity? What does this mean for them as a person-in-the-world? consider the application of Heidegger and IPA over other paradigms or qualitative methodologies.

While other approaches such as constructivist grounded theory, ethnography, discursive and narrative analysis (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) can all produce insights into the human condition, what determines the most suitable approach must be driven fundamentally by the research objectives. Some methodologies simply attempt to produce an objective account of the event itself or try to generate theory about a given context. IPA created a robust framework in which to generating findings, with its five-stage iterative process keeping the researcher focused through continuous engagement and reflection. Moreover, the iterative process enabled things to become visible in ways not previously understood by the researcher, or the participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), thus creating new insights into how a phenomenon influences a person's sense of being.

It is important to note that this study is limited by its sample size, unique participant experiences, and temporality. Generalizations are of course impossible when it comes to any study of the lived experience, however it was possible to identify some shared commonalities based on the context of the study i.e. similarity in the type of experience experienced. They all expressed the need to engage in detailed preparation. This ranged from teaching materials that gave them a sense of control, to organizing accommodation, travel, visas and informing family members. They all shared the need to prove themselves credible in their new teaching environment. Each participant journeyed through the ready-to-hand and the unready-to-hand mode of engagement, where all participants were subjected to a distortion in their normal teaching environment. A distortion or problem requires an adjustment and re-evaluation in one's beliefs (Heidegger, 1962; Packer, 1985; Leonard, 1994). From this, the participants seemed to develop a new form of appreciation of other people, environments, and themselves. Many developed new insights which translated into new appreciations for their capabilities as human beings.

Although I am inclined to suggest that similarities exist in my participants' *fore-structure* such as previous experiences of international work, tendencies toward adventure, and previous working environments, it would be incorrect to state that *fore-structure* can be "fixed," "identified," and "isolated." *Fore-structure* is a complex phenomenon that is in a constant state of flux affected by cultural and social interaction. Heidegger's hermeneutic cycle clearly shows how important *Being-in-the-world* is and how *Dasein* learns from its experiences continuously. The circle of understanding can influence *fore-structure* at any time. Heidegger (1962) states "the essence of Dasein lies in its existence" (p. 67) meaning through our activities we give ourselves our nature, who we are lies in what we do. Therefore, the more we are involved in a particular situation the more we understand ourselves.

However, it would be wrong to suppose that a certain view of the world created by a person's background means that they are capable or incapable of adapting or being involved in international teaching. Only by allowing TF the opportunities to engage in international work will they take that experience and develop it through a circle of understanding (Heidegger, 1962) and learn more about themselves. However, it is noted that while TF may opt to engage in overseas teaching, not all TF may feel comfortable with being involved once the experience has passed, regardless of the potential for existential learning, and this should be respected. As should it be respected when individuals decide never to engage in these opportunities. What is interesting to observe from this study is what can be learnt about the nature of a person, from their choices and how this may influence their next sense-making experience.

By encouraging more researchers to utilize IPA in studies concerning the *lived experiences* of individuals, that is, in health care, education, retirement etc. there is possibility that work can be clustered and reviewed to examine common features, and to explore variations across contexts and samples in studies, so broader claims can be made about the phenomenology at work. IPA offers a fascinating and rich way of engaging with and understanding other people's worlds. It provides insights into the lives of people that may otherwise have been unheard, ignored or constructed and evaluated based upon mainstream theoretical models.

However, the application of Heidegger in conjunction with IPA is not without its challenges. Heidegger is a complex

philosopher and studying his ideas takes time and patience. It helps to engage in a range of texts Dreyfus (1991), J. A. Smith et al., (2009), Leonard (1994), and Gadamer (1975) who comment on Heidegger's work to help strengthen the knowledge base of any researcher who wishes to understand and apply his philosophy. IPA also requires time to navigate and apply in practice. The five-stage methodology requires that one be willing to engage with complexity, which includes unpredictability and chaos generated by the lived world.

Finally, in relation to the findings of the study, the researcher recommends further research be conducted on the effect of overseas teaching on TF because these experiences are more profound and burdensome then many may think. HEIs are thus encouraged to use the information extracted to develop meaningful institutional support networks and relevant training programs. TF should thus be nurtured while working on any transnational arrangement because ultimately the long-term survival of any partnership rests upon the willingness of TF to participate.

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