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Why Teach? A Project-ive Life-world Approach to Understanding What Teaching Means for Teachers

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Why Teach? A Project-ive Life-world Approach to Understanding What Teaching Means for Teachers

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Abstract

Previous literature has examined teachers' motivations to teach in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motives, personality dimensions, and teacher burnout. These findings have been cast in the rubric of differences between teachers and non-teachers and the linear relations between these measures among teachers. Utilizing a phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 1970) to analyze data generated in structured interviews with four tenured professors from small, liberal arts universities whose central mission is teaching, this paper presents the telic or project-ive horizons of teaching – those motives aimed at what is 'not yet' (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Results revealed that teaching is understood by teachers to be a dialogical enterprise between a teacher and learners across dimensions of transformation, knowledge, and personhood. This dialogue entailed an abiding tension between self and other, activity and passivity, giving and receiving, preparation and spontaneity, instructing and learning, leading and following, asserting and withdrawing. It comprised an orientation to a teachers' vision for the possible future personhood of the teacher and their students and to the character of the world which teachers and learners inhabit together. These findings are discussed in terms of the reviewed literature and as a case in point for a vital complementarity of research approaches.

Keywords: teaching, motives, teachers, burnout, qualitative, phenomenology

¿Por qué Enseñar? Un Proyecto-ivo del Mundo de la vida para Entender qué Significa la Enseñanza para los Maestros

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Resumen

La literatura ha examinado las motivaciones de los docentes para enseñar en términos de motivos intrínsecos y extrínsecos, las dimensiones de la personalidad, y el desgaste. Estos hallazgos han sido expuestos mediante diferencias entre maestros y no-maestros y las relaciones lineales de este indicativo entre los maestros. Utilizando un enfoque fenomenológico (Giorgi, 1970) para analizar los datos generados en entrevistas estructuradas con cuatro profesores titulares de una pequeña universidad de humanidades cuya misión central es la docencia, este trabajo presenta los horizontes telic o proyect-ivos de la enseñanza - esos motivos que apuntan a lo que "no es todavía" (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Los resultados revelaron que la enseñanza es entendida por los maestros como una relación dialógica entre un maestro y sus estudiantes a través de dimensiones de transformación, conocimiento y personalidad. Este diálogo implicaba una tensión constante entre el yo y el otro, la actividad y la pasividad, el dar y recibir, la preparación y la espontaneidad, instruir y aprender, dirigir y seguir, afirmar y retirar. Esto comprendía una orientación de los maestros hacia su posible futura personalidad y la de sus estudiantes y sobre el carácter del mundo en el que profesores y estudiantes cohabitan. Estos hallazgos se discuten en términos de la literatura revisada y como ejemplo de una complementariedad vital de los enfoques de investigación

Palabras clave: enseñanza, motivaciones, profesores, agotamiento, cualitativo, fenomenología

Why do teachers teach? Previous literature has examined this question from the standpoint of motivation to become a teacher, personality dimensions associated with teaching success, and factors associated with teacher burnout. Given that much of the literature seeks to provide an ‘explanation’ (see Garza, 2007), answers to the question ‘Why teach?’ remain incomplete. Utilizing a phenomenological approach (Garza, 2007; Giorgi, 1970) and a modified thematic collation analysis (Garza, 2011) of data generated in structured interviews with professors at a small, liberal arts university whose central mission is teaching, this paper presents a reframing of this question in terms of what teaching means to teachers. By employing a phenomenological approach, our aim was to understand how, with respect to teaching, "the motive, the act and the end are all constituted in a single upsurge" of meaning (Sartre, 1956, p. 565).

Review of the Literature

Defining and understanding an individual as a teacher has been studied in a variety of ways. Primarily, previous studies have defined teachers by assessing motivations for teaching, researching prominent personality characteristics among teachers, and studying aspects of teaching associated with teacher burnout.

Motivations to Teach

Analyzing teachers’ motivations for teaching has consistently revealed intrinsic and altruistic motivators as the primary factors in one’s decision to become and to remain a teacher. Interview-based studies found the desire to help children, to make a positive difference in society, to experience personal growth (Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013), and to experience high job satisfaction (Williams & Forgasz, 2009) as the most prevalent motives among teachers in addition to widespread attitudes of selflessness and altruism (May, Mand, Biertz, Hummers-Pradier, & Kruschinski, 2012). Additionally, studies using the factors influencing teaching (FIT) measurement revealed high levels of motivation to teach in those who desired to enhance social equity (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012) and had high levels of intrinsic career value (Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011) as well as social utility value (Lin, Shi, Wang, Zhang, & Hui,

2012). In contrast, external factors including time for family, salary, status (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012), and self-expression (Lin et al., 2012) were lower in participants motivated to teach.

Further, self-efficacy not only impacted participants' motivation to become a teacher but also their decision to remain a teacher. Studies have found that those highly motivated to teach were also motivated by positive teaching and learning experiences (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012), a high perceived ability to teach (Klassen et al., 2011), positive experiences with adolescents or young people, positive training or instructing roles experience, and the feeling that teaching would coincide with their skill set, interests (Williams & Forgasz, 2009), and future goals (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Both the intrinsic and extrinsic motives to teach as well as the experienced self-efficacy and altruism of teachers presented in the literature suggest a nexus of meaning out of which teaching emerges as attractive and desirable to certain individuals. This attraction or motive points to a telic dimension of teaching for teachers, an orientation to possibility and the future comprising aims or goals for oneself, others and the world which call for a research approach attuned to meaning in order to be illuminated.

Personality among Teachers

The literature on teachers has also explored the role of personality. Students who rated teachers more satisfactorily also perceived them as humorous, positive, (Huang & Lin, 2014; Poraj, 2010), agreeable (Kneipp, Kelly, Biscoe, & Richard, 2010), energetic and engaging (Senko, Belmonte, & Yakhkind, 2012). Extroversion was also identified as a positive characteristic in teachers as it negatively related to burnout (Kokkinos, 2007) and emotional exhaustion (Basim, Begenirbaş, & Yaçın, 2013). Furthermore, conscientiousness was revealed as a prevalent personality trait among teachers as well as a predictor of high personal accomplishment (Kokkinos, 2007) and student academic success (Tok & Morali, 2009) in conjunction with low depersonalization (Kokkinos, 2007) and burnout (Sulea, Filipescu, Horga, Orțan, & Fischmann, 2012). The most prominent personality characteristic negatively associated with teachers was neuroticism as these individuals were more emotionally exhausted (Basim et al., 2013; Pretsch, Flunger, & Schmitt, 2012), more mentally distant (Sulea et al., 2012), and were associated with lower academic success

among students (Tok & Morali, 2009). While this literature sheds light on the prominent personality characteristics of successful teachers, it also suggests a nexus of meaning of teaching for teachers such that teaching is understood as expressing and resonating with some core values or understandings of oneself in relation to others and the world, and out of which teaching is understood as desirable and attractive. An investigation of these dimensions using a research approach attuned to meaning would help to illuminate this.

Teacher Burnout

Previous research has also investigated burnout among teachers as a third way of characterizing teachers and to understand the distinction between those who teach and those who have stopped teaching. Such research characterizes burnout as a concept involving increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in addition to a lack of personal accomplishment (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011), vigor, dedication, and absorption (Rey, Extremera, & Pena, 2012). One contributor to burnout was one's level of stress and ability to cope in a healthy and effective manner. Research has revealed job stress among teachers to be positively correlated with burnout rates (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) as well as aspects of burnout including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, depression, and reduced personal accomplishment (Steinhardt, Smith Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011). Further, studies found ineffective coping strategies for stress such as passive coping or surface acting, in which the teacher hides genuine emotion by putting on an emotional mask, to be associated with burnout (Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011) and related constructs including low subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and high negative affect (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari 2009). Thus low levels of stress and effective coping strategies were prevalent characteristics of individuals who continue to teach.

A second category studied in relation to burnout was self-efficacy. Previous research found self-efficacy was negatively associated with burnout (Friedman, 2003; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and job stress level (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) while positively associated with job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Additionally, one's teaching experience was positively related to self-efficacy (Chang, Lin, & Song, 2011; Yeo, Ang, Chong, Huan, & Quek, 2008) and job satisfaction (Thomason & La Paro, 2013). Therefore, confidence in one's teaching ability, significantly related to level of experience and job satisfaction, was identified by previous research as a contributing factor to burnout among teachers.

A third contributor to burnout was the level of support received from students, parents, and colleagues. The behavior and response of students to a teacher's instruction was identified as an influential factor in teacher burnout. Specifically, both increased stress and decreased job satisfaction, both aspects of burnout, were found among teachers experiencing poor student behavior (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Kokkinos, 2007). Lack of parental support and cooperation were also identified as contributing factors to burnout and to lower teacher retention (Hughes, 2012). Further, support (Friedman, 2003), cooperation (Koruklu, Feyzioglu, Özenoğlu-Kiremit, & Aladağ, 2012), and positive interpersonal relationships (Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011) with and from colleagues were all negatively related to burnout. While these studies indicated the importance of factors in the teaching milieu that significantly contribute to the retention of teachers in their profession, they also suggest a telic horizon regarding the future and possibilities of one's world and one's place within it upon which the meaning of teaching emerges. Approaching this question from an approach attuned to such meaning might enable us to understand stress, efficacy, and burnout as expressive of an understanding of teaching in light of one's standing with respect to one's aims and goals for oneself in the world.

Current Study

Previous studies have revealed the motivational impact of intrinsic factors, altruistic attitudes, and self-efficacy, the prevalent personality characteristics of those who teach, as well as key factors contributing to teacher burnout. While these motives are associated with the decision to teach, they also imply telic, future and possibility oriented meanings of teaching not yet explored in the literature. Similarly, personality dimensions and traits associated with teaching outcomes may be an expression of these aims of teaching for teachers. The literature regarding teacher burnout demonstrates that motivation to remain a teacher is related to whether and

how teachers understand their telic visions for themselves, their students and the world are being enacted and supported. The current study therefore aims to augment and compliment the insights offered by this literature by exploring the question, “Why teach?,” in view of the nexus of lived meaning out of which a teacher’s answer to this question emerges. (See Landrum & Garza, 2015, for a discussion of the complementarity of understanding proffered by quantitative and qualitative approaches).

Method

Approach

To illuminate this telic meaning dimension of motivation to teach, we undertook this research from a phenomenological ‘project-ive life world approach’ (Garza & Landrum, 2015) situated within the ‘Dallas Approach’ to phenomenological research (Garza, 2007) and rooted in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1927/1962). Following Heidegger, a person's world is understood in reference to a fundamental ‘being ahead’ of oneself, a characteristic he calls *projecting*. Heidegger recognizes these *projects* need not be explicitly known but instead form a matrix of *possibilities* and meanings in reference to which one *understands* oneself, others, and the world. This research seeks to illuminate this interplay to describe the *projects* which undergird teachers’ *understandings* of what teaching means to teachers.

Participants

Guided by the principle that the best participants for a phenomenological investigation are those who have had the experience being investigated and are willing and able to describe it (Polkinghorne, 1989), we sought participants who are teachers motivated and excited about teaching across a range of disciplines. They were chosen based upon their reputations among both students and faculty as especially good teachers. These individuals were contacted via email or in person and asked about their willingness to participate. All approached expressed an interest and excitement about the topic; many remarked that they often did not get a chance to talk about teaching and were excited about this opportunity to do so. In total, 4

tenured Full or Associate Professors (3 males) from 3 disciplines participated. All participants teach at small, liberal arts universities whose central mission is teaching. All participants provided written consent to participate in this study and agreed to have their interview audio-recorded. This research project was approved by the university's institutional review board.

'Socrates' is a Professor of Philosophy and has been teaching at his university for 30 years. He teaches both introductory classes taken by non-majors as well as upper level classes in the Philosophy major.

'Albert' is a Professor of Psychology who teaches introductory classes to underclass students interested in psychology as well as upper level electives for the Psychology major. He has been teaching at his university for 28 years.

'Homer' is an Associate Professor of English who teaches both introductory classes required for all students and upper level classes for English majors. He has been teaching at his university for 20 years.

'Emily' is a Professor of English who teaches introductory classes required for all students as well as upper level classes for the English major. She has been teaching at her university for 42 years.

Interview

Participants were contacted via email to set up a meeting time for the interview at their convenience. They were provided with the following list of questions in preparation for the interview. We encouraged them to look over the questions, but not to necessarily write their answers down, in an effort to enable them to reflect upon their teaching career prior to the interview. Interviews took place in faculty offices on campus, ranging from approximately 60 – 90 minutes, and were conducted by the first and/or third author(s). All interviews were audio-recorded and selections of the data were transcribed.

The following list of questions was used to conduct a guided interview and was also provided to the participant prior to the interview:

- How did you come to the realization that you wanted to teach?
- What do you most love/enjoy about teaching?
- What are your biggest challenges/concerns regarding teaching?

- Can you recall an instance when you felt you were most enacting what it means to you to be a teacher?
- Is there anything else you would like to convey to help us understand what it means to you to be a teacher or what motivates you to teach?

During the interview, participants were asked each of these questions and asked to elaborate and expand on their own experiences and understandings of what it means to be a teacher. The interviews were opened without restrictions on time.

Data Analysis

Using a phenomenological ‘approach’ (Giorgi, 1970) focused on the interplay of *projects* and *understandings* (Garza & Landrum, 2015; Heidegger, 1927/1962) and a modified version of Garza’s (2011) thematic collation technique, the following steps were conducted to analyze the data: First, all three authors independently listened to the interviews in full to become familiar with and develop an impression of the entire collection of data. Second, since we were interested in exploring the meanings of being a teacher, we listened to the interviews a second time explicitly noting places in the data, or moments, that revealed a dimension of meaning of being a teacher. Our analysis was hermeneutic in that we interpreted the data in light of the following questions: *What does it mean to be a teacher? What concerns, projects, horizons, ie what dimensions of meaning emerge when discussing teaching? How do the participants understand their role as a teacher?* Third, the moments were transcribed and collated together to create overarching themes. All three researchers met several times to discuss these themes and begin elaborating upon the specific ways the themes were manifest in the data as well as the best way to organize and express the themes in a final narrative. This narrative comprises the results section and is organized around the three central themes identified through this process: *transformation, knowledge, and personhood*. Each of the themes was taken up in light of various concerns or projects of the participants along dimensions for self, others, and the word. Throughout the results, quotes from the participants are used to shed further light on what it means to be a teacher.

Results

Teaching is understood by teachers to be a dialogical enterprise involving a teacher and a learner across dimensions of transformation, knowledge, and personhood. This dialogue entails an abiding reciprocal interplay and tension between self and other, activity and passivity, giving and receiving, preparation and spontaneity, instructing and learning, leading and following, asserting and withdrawing. It comprises relationships to the material or subject matter, the mode of discourse within which it is disclosed, and a vision on the teacher's part of the personhood of the teacher and learner as well as the world which such persons would inhabit. Across all these horizons, teaching is understood by teachers as moving oneself and the learner beyond where they are now and towards a vision of a life of inquiry and authority with both particular regard to the subject matter and more generally with regard to knowledge/learning as part of a vision of meritorious personhood and community.

Transformation

"My explaining helps me understand [the content]" - Homer

"You lose the capacity to engage students if it's too fixed...You have to find a different way into [the books]." - Emily

"You see them not just walking with confidence but approaching their work with a kind of confidence and approaching one another with a kind of confidence." - Socrates

"I participate and give guiding questions...but they really are exploring the text together" - Homer

For teachers, a primary dimension of teaching is the transformative relationship they have with the material or subject matter. This relationship, in which the individual converses with the material as both a student and a teacher, involves a movement beyond the foundational content to a particular engagement with the world in light of the content. The teacher oscillates between engaging in this transformation as the learner and as the

teacher whose goal is for students to join them in a transformational conversation with the material. As a learner, the teacher understands the material as inexhaustible and ever renewing such that a continued engagement with the content furthers one's understanding and transformative experience. In this engagement, new and different perspectives, interpretations, and understandings are sought through continued discourse with the content as well as through openness to the thoughts and questions of students. For example, Homer discussed an instance when he could not achieve by himself "the rich interpretation that we as a community have had," revealing how the learning emerges in dialogue with the students. For teachers, this never ending engagement with the material is imperative for teaching and involves one seeking out and being open to being drawn into the subject matter again and again. In finding different ways to engage in the material, excitement and enthusiasm for the content is reignited for the teacher and is brought into the classroom. For example, Emily stated that she "read some books and got interested again in [subject matter], got excited about [subject matter]" because "you lose the capacity to engage students if it's too fixed...You have to find a different way into [the books]." Engaging the material as a learner is therefore not understood by teachers as a relationship pursued for their own benefit, but rather as an essential part of one's goal of bringing students into this transformative relationship with the teacher, the material, and ultimately, the world.

In relating to the material as a teacher, an aspiration for students to engage the content through a transformative relationship is proffered by the teacher. Rather than handing students information to learn and repeat back through a paper or test, for teachers, teaching is seeking to facilitate a discourse between the teacher, students, and the subject matter. Through participating in this conversation independently, the teacher has developed a kind of ground from which an on-going transformation in relation to the material occurs. For teachers, however, teaching not only involves a transformation of self through engagement with their discipline but an aim for students to join them and participate in this transformative discourse is also essential. Homer recalled an inspirational teacher who had a "genuine concern that [he] have a genuine relationship to [the material]." For a teacher, the content is not understood as the end goal, but rather as the foundational piece in which a transformation takes place and the students'

worlds are influenced in light of the material. Teachers recognize students' new confidence, willingness to think with others, and engagement as indicating the fulfillment of an aim to foster the possibility of this transformation in which the student has gained knowledge and is prepared to author their own on-going transformative journey. In the fulfillment of this concern, a new excitement for the material is experienced by the teacher. Homer described this excitement when saying that "when majors fall in love with a [subject matter], you fall in love with that [subject matter] all over again." For teachers, teaching is therefore a discourse between the teacher, students, and subject matter that calls for the teacher to continuously engage the content as both a learner who is being transformed and a teacher who is working to foster the possibility of a transformation for others.

Knowledge

"The way I think about a class is, we're all learners." – Albert

"Professing implies you know something, which I don't...I'm just here a little bit ahead of you." – Homer

"[Teaching] makes the world appear to them more truthfully...and more interestingly...knowing you have a companion in the sphere of truth." – Socrates

"Good teaching is leading students beyond where they are in terms of thinking...to where they can be more open to real questioning." – Albert

"The content is easy, it's disposing the kid, and I've got to figure out what the roadblock is." – Socrates

"It's a matter of how much you allow yourself to lose your script." – Emily

"[Teaching is] a performance in which you really do have to internalize it and then you just have to let go...and that letting go is exhilarating." – Homer

In teaching, the aimed-at transformation of students involves the acquisition of knowledge such that the students' understandings of themselves in the world is deepened, broadened, and enhanced. Knowledge is understood by teachers as an integration of the material and one's individual perspective to engage or 'shake hands' with the world, to paraphrase Socrates. This engagement involves moving beyond where students are in their thinking to a place where they become more open to thoughtful, thorough, and contemplative questioning and conversation with each other, the teacher, and the material. For teachers, students' acquisition of knowledge is distinct from obtaining information, for knowledge requires participation in a transformative engagement beyond the classroom while acquisition of information does not require activity but only a passive receptivity to content that remains confined to the classroom. While mastering a class means accumulating information, a transformation is an entering into "a sphere of truth" according to Socrates. In this transformation, the world is understood differently, more truthfully, and more interestingly and the goal of the teacher has been achieved, for a teacher understands students' knowledge as moving beyond the confines of the classroom to more richly engage in a mutually transforming relationship between self, others, and world.

The acquisition of knowledge not only allows for a transformation, but according to teachers, also allows for fluidity between the roles of teacher and student. In this fluidity, teachers are able to fulfill a desire to pass on their *at-homeness* with the discipline such that knowledge gained by students continues to influence their future engagements and opens up the possibility for a continued 'handshake' with the world. According to the participants, the "epitome of the life of learning" is when there is an "alternating [of] the role of teaching and students." Teachers do not understand teaching as an "abstracted watching," "imparting of wisdom," or a professing of information but rather as the fostering of an environment in which "we are all learners" with the teacher accompanying the students on this journey. Teachers ultimately understand teaching as a relationship with transformed students in which both students and teacher converse within a realm of truth and walk together in an understanding of the world that has become evident to students in light of knowledge imparted by the teacher.

Teachers understand decisions regarding the presentation of subject matter, the structure of the class, and the role of grades and evaluations as necessary, but not sufficient, aspects of fostering the possibility of a transformation in students. In deciding how to best present the content, a question of spontaneity versus preparedness arises as part of teaching, for how one disposes the students to information and knowledge greatly influences the way in which it is received and understood. Though teachers understand the teaching process as one needing some preparedness, a level of spontaneity is also experienced as necessary to allow for the class to organically grow in knowledge and naturally move in the direction that best fits the particular class. This balance between spontaneity and strict structure is a prevailing question that constantly arises in teaching for each class of students is different and every time the class meets a different balance between the two poles must be struck. As Emily said, “it’s a matter of how much you allow yourself to lose your script” within the flow of a class. The information that needs to be taught is understood as needing to be more strictly held to while the way in which it is presented can and does often involve flexibility and spontaneity.

In addition to the flow of the class, grades and evaluations play a particular role in teaching. For teachers, while grades are understood as necessary for assessing individual students and introducing the dimension of a universal rubric, they can also be a hindrance to a teacher’s aimed-at transformation for students. Albert expressed this danger in grades and stated, “grades are a necessary evil” for there is a real danger that a focus on grades makes collecting information the job of a student and grades become their wages. Teachers understand grades in part as capable of prohibiting the possibility of transformative knowledge when high grades become the priority of students rather than acquiring transformative knowledge and understanding. Because grades are also experienced as necessary for the assessment of students and for a universal rubric, a second difficult balance must be struck between lenient grading and harsh grading in order to create an environment that fosters the possibility of transformation for students. Therefore, teaching is understood as a conversation between teacher, students, and material that reaches beyond the classroom to a transforming relationship with the world which is only possible when dichotomies within classroom structure, presentation of content, and grading are delicately balanced and tailored to the specific needs of every class.

Personhood

“[Teaching is] the best part of myself.” - Emily

“You see them not just walking with confidence but approaching their work with a kind of confidence and approaching one another with a kind of confidence.” - Socrates

“Any one in that classroom could be my daughter’s husband or my son’s wife...[wanting them to be] the kind of person who is worthy of that relationship.” - Socrates

“[I] try to teach them [students] as human beings...help them grow up a little bit.” - Albert

“[We model] forms of citizenship.” - Socrates

“If they catch what the place is about, they also want to be learners and that’s a never-ending process.” - Albert

Teaching is understood as intimately intertwined with the personhood of the teacher for one’s way of orienting and understanding as a teacher is not a way of being that is separate from the individual. Being a teacher is not experienced by our participants as an occupation that one participates in while at school and turns off elsewhere but instead is part of who the individual is and understands themselves to be. A teacher does not understand their *teacherly self* as a separate identity but rather as part of who they are and a way of thinking and being that is an organic expression of one’s learning that cannot be escaped, turned off, or put aside. When teaching, therefore, a kind of *at-homeness* is experienced for it is in accompanying students towards a transformation that a teacher feels comfortable, at home, and most themselves. In this *at-homeness* a teacher experiences the teaching environment as in their possession such that one’s intentions and aims are being met and reciprocated in this domain. It is the desire of teachers to share their *at-homeness* with the material with students through knowledge and the transformative experience. Therefore, teaching is a way of existing and understanding one’s world that cannot be separated

from the individual and is accompanied by a desire to share this understanding with students.

In teachers' aim to share with students their *at-homeness* with the material through transformative knowledge, the personhood of the student is also involved in teaching such that a concern for the students as members of a shared community and world is experienced. The classroom environment, including content and discourse, is understood by teachers as a privileged and sacred domain when students share in the transformative relationship and *at-homeness* with the material. For teachers, this privileged and aimed-at relationship between themselves, the students, the material, and the world calls for a level of care and honor for its sacredness. The sacredness of the content and discourse opened to students by teachers is experienced as most honored when the transformation of students enlightens their way of understanding the world and impacts the greater community. Teaching involves a vision of a community populated by thoughtful students and consequently a concern for the knowledge and understanding of these students not only within the community of the classroom but within the community of the world. Socrates, for example, remarked that any student in the classroom could be the spouse of the teacher's son or daughter. Hence, for teachers, teaching involves making available the sacredness of the content and discourse of a class for students whose way of understanding the world in the present and future is of concern and value. Though the desire and aim for a transformed student and citizen to emerge from one's class is present for teachers, ultimately, teaching is an act of faith and trust, for one seldom knows the influence or impact experienced by the students. From the perspective of teachers, teaching is therefore a discourse between the teacher, the students, and the material in which the teacher trustingly strives to create an environment where students join the teacher in a transformed understanding of the world that positively influences the community they inhabit in the future.

Discussion

Summary of Results

Our phenomenological analysis of the interview data revealed teaching to be understood by teachers as an abidingly dialogical enterprise between

oneself and one's students, aiming at the enactment of a vision of a life of inquiry with both particular regard to the subject matter and more generally with regard to knowledge/learning as part of a vision of meritorious personhood and community. It is understood as an organic dialogue between self, students, the subject matter and a vision of community across a reciprocal interplay between self and other, activity and passivity, giving and receiving, preparation and spontaneity, instructing and learning, leading and following, asserting and withdrawing. This interplay is understood as advancing and enacting a vision on the teacher's part of their own and their student's' personhood and the character of world which they inhabit together. Complementing the literature's findings regarding motives, personality traits, or efficacy and coping skills, teacher's answers to the question 'why teach' emerged as 'vocational' – as the expression, fulfillment, and enactment of a telic project for oneself, students and the world. Let us now return to the reviewed literature to examine the implications of these findings.

Return to the Literature

Motives

Dimensions of the reviewed literature regarding intrinsic motives such as a desire to make a positive contribution to society and experience personal growth (Struyven et al., 2013), attitudes of selflessness and altruism (May et al., 2012), and high job satisfaction (Williams & Forgasz, 2009) were apparent in our findings. Similarly, extrinsic motives such as concerns for social equity and self-expression (Lin et al., 2012) also were apparent in the interview data. However, the dialogical character of our findings augment this literature to express a broader nexus of meaning of teaching for teachers. Our themes of transformation, knowledge and personhood all were seen to refer to both the teacher and the student in reciprocally intertwined ways that seemed to go beyond the categories of self and other, intrinsic and extrinsic. For our participants, the enactment of their projects for an extrinsic world and for students was seen as the concurrent fulfillment of a project of self, each mutually dependent upon the other aspect of a univocal project in teaching wherein neither aspect alone could

be said to motivate that project. These motives are as much expressions of an orientation to teach as they are motives for it.

Personality

Our results were not focused students' perceptions of teachers nor on the personality dimensions described in the literature. Nonetheless, all the participants alluded directly or indirectly to the importance of openness to their students' experience and perspectives and a desire to foster such reciprocal openness in their students as an important dimension of their teaching. Beyond the literature's descriptions of highly rated teachers as humorous, positive, (Huang & Lin, 2014; Poraj, 2010), agreeable (Kneipp, Kelly, Biscoe, & Richard, 2010), energetic, engaging (Senko, Belmonte, & Yakhkind, 2012), and extroverted (Kokkinos, 2007) our results spoke to an abiding sense of teachers becoming most alive and most themselves in their vocation to teach. Emily stated this succinctly, saying, "[teaching is] the best part of myself." In this light, the findings in the literature that neuroticism and being distant were associated with poorer student outcomes (Basim et al., 2013; Pretsch et al., 2012; Sulea et al., 2012; Tok & Morali, 2009) shed light on these factors, not so much as predictors of such outcomes, but as expressions of such teachers' understandings that their valued telic projects for themselves, their students, and the world in teaching are not coming to fruition such that they are unable to envision a path to their enactment.

Burnout

The literature regarding teacher burnout perhaps most strongly underlines the value of our integrative project-ive phenomenological approach. Emily initially declined our invitation to participate citing her concern with having just experienced a semester where her teaching had not met her expectations. However, she eventually agreed to participate citing a renewal of interest in her teaching. Her experience illuminated how the question 'why teach' can sometimes be answered negatively and that even in these cases the nexus of meaning highlighted in our results were the ground from which the meaning of teaching was understood. All of our participants noted the value of a continued return to the material taught in their desire to

share their knowledge and vision with their students. Homer described this counterpoint to burnout captured in our theme of ‘at home-ness’ within teaching, saying that “when majors fall in love with a [subject matter], you fall in love with that [subject matter] all over again.” This ‘at home-ness’ is manifest in teachers’ understandings that they have created a community of learners whose transformation extends beyond the classroom into a model of virtuous living. The lack of personal accomplishment (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011), vigor, dedication, and absorption (Rey, Extremera, & Pena, 2012) characteristic of burnout in the literature can now be understood as expressing a teacher’s inability to envision a path to the enactment of their telic vision or project(s) for teaching and the understanding that these project(s) are not or are no longer held in similar esteem by their students, institutions, or possibly by themselves. Indeed the literature’s findings that ‘surface acting’ (Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011), low subjective well-being, and negative affect (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari 2009) as well as low self-efficacy (Friedman, 2003; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and job stress level (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) are related to burnout seem to support this understanding.

Across the three main threads of the literature we reviewed, our results shed further light on these insights in view of the telic and meaning dimensions of teachers’ understandings of their teaching. In view of our results, motives to teach, personality dimensions associated with teaching outcomes, and burnout and efficacy can all be seen as manifestation of a teacher’s understanding of the degree to which his or her vision of an aimed-at self, other, and world across dimensions of transformation, knowledge, and personhood are being realized and made possible.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current study must be understood within its limitations. The sample comprised successful, full time tenured faculty, all in humanities disciplines, at liberal arts teaching universities, and all participants were personally known by the interviewing researchers. While all the participants seemed eager to talk about teaching with the researchers, it is not clear whether or how our pre-existing relationships may have impacted the course and content of the interviews. Some dimensions of social desirability

may have been in play, but it seems equally likely that familiarity with the researchers may also have facilitated openness and honesty. The homogeneity of the sample in regard to tenured status, disciplines (all humanities, two from English), and university level instruction might also constrain the generalizability of the findings. While it is our expectation that the imaginative variation in our analysis would enable us to arrive at the ‘trans-situational’ elements of our findings (see Garza, 2007, 2011; Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, Wertz, 1983, 1985), and even as phenomenological researchers have shown that in-depth analysis of even a single case can suffice to develop a general structure of a phenomenon (see Wertz, 1983, 1985) it would be beneficial to expand the current analysis to include a greater variety of teachers, across a greater variety of disciplines, with a greater range of experience and within a greater variety of educational settings in future research.

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