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Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology to Research Teacher Professional Learning

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Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology to Research Teacher Professional Learning

Abstract

The professional growth of teachers is complex to study given the many factors involved in both adult learning and student outcomes. This article proposes phenomenology as an effective philosophy and method to provide a holistic investigation by describing a hermeneutic study of the professional learning experiences of teachers in the International Baccalaureate program. It is hoped this account will clarify some of the misconceptions regarding the different forms of phenomenology and provide detailed guidance to researchers utilizing this methodology to study professional development and other forms of learning in educational contexts.

Keywords

phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, methodology, professional learning, professional development

Introduction

Teachers play a significant role in student learning and achievement according to longstanding research (Hallinger et al., 2014; Leigh, 2010; Nye et al., 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Yet the K-12 educational context is becoming increasingly more complex, and teachers need to be supported in facing the challenge of preparing students for a rapidly changing world. Professional development is key to both individual and collective growth, yet this requires careful design if it is to result in lasting and effective change in teacher knowledge and competency (Cordingley et al., 2015). Many studies have looked at the characteristics of effective professional learning in a range of contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) but there have been criticisms of the methodology of some of these investigations. Kennedy (2016), for example, pointed out that most research into professional development has looked either at content or design features, while instead it should focus on the theory of action; that is, the specific learning strategy employed to effect the desired change. Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) similarly criticized the research methods of prior studies and urged the need for more rigorous evaluation of professional learning interventions.

Rigorous evaluation of professional learning is indeed challenging to accomplish, given the interplay of various factors in the learning process. According to Guskey's (2000) seminal work on professional development, these factors include (a) the reactions of individual participants to the training, (b) the acquired learning of the participants, (c) support and change from the participant's organization, (d) the participants' use of the acquired knowledge and skills, and (e) student learning outcomes. Such an extensive evaluation is beyond the scope of most research studies, which tend instead to focus on isolated factors. A common approach to research on professional development is to ask teachers for their perceptions about training they

have attended (for example, whether they found it helpful to their work) or to observe the degree to which knowledge and skills were implemented after the end of the development program. It is clear, however, that such responses and observations will be subjective in nature, as they are based on individual interpretations which are colored by personal bias and prior experiences. This is not to say that subjective data are not of value; indeed, the constructivist philosophy of education proposes that reality is not objective but rather is created, transformed, and understood by individuals and groups as they interact with the world around them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When individual beliefs and perceptions are taken out of the larger context of the learning process and the organization in which it occurs, however, it is difficult to provide assurance that other, unconsidered factors did not influence or modify the findings (Lundberg et al., 2022). This is true even of so-called objective data. A quantified growth in student scores might imply that a professional development program or activity was effective, but causation is difficult to prove unless all mediating and moderating variables can be accounted for (Cook et al., 2010).

Phenomenology offers a solution to the challenges of researching professional development, involving a holistic research approach that gives voice to participant experiences, not beliefs or perceptions, and takes into account the full context within which that experience occurs. Phenomenology is both a qualitative methodology as well as a philosophical tradition that seeks to examine the lived experience of a phenomenon, with the underlying assumption that it is one's experience, not an external, objective reality, which influences human behavior (Cohen et al., 2007). A particular advantage of phenomenology is that it allows the researcher to engage in interpretation of this constructed reality through direct engagement with those who have experienced the phenomenon first-hand. As van Manen (2016) explained,

Meaning is already implicated in the mystery of prereflective reflection of seeing, hearing, touch, being touched, and being-in-touch with the world. ... The phenomenological pathos is the loving project of bringing all the living of life to meaningful expression through the imageries and languages of phenomenological writing, composing, and expressing (p. 18).

The intent of phenomenology is, through discovery and description, to provide a holistic depiction of the phenomenon and its meaning for the participants of the research (Morrison, 2012). This aligns well with Guskey's recommendation for studies into professional development to consider multiple influencing factors.

There are different forms of phenomenology. Husserl (1931) first proposed transcendental phenomenology as a move away from the positivist emphasis on empirical science, advocating instead for a return to the search for wisdom that had preoccupied early Greek philosophers. Rather than reverting to the subjectivity which is often a characteristic of qualitative research, however, Husserl and his followers encouraged the suspension or bracketing of preconceptions and judgements (known as *epoché*) in order to be open to seeing the world as it is; in other words, providing an objective perspective of the participants' subjective experiences. Husserl's student, Heidegger, however, did not believe it was possible to ignore one's existing knowledge and experience, arguing that the researcher is always present in the world and consciousness which he studies (Heidegger, 1927/1982). He thus proposed hermeneutic phenomenology, in which the researcher makes their personal biases explicit, and, during the process of data analysis, they reflect back and forth between the research data and their own interpretation of that information. This interpretation is based on both the holistic

context of the lived experience as it was described by participants as well as the researchers' prior experience of the phenomenon in question. Vagle (2018) explained that,

Phenomenologists do not assume that any one individual's experiences of some 'thing' wholly belongs to that individual in any sort of final or idealized way. The philosophical assumption is that the individual is being, becoming, and moving through the lifeworld in intersubjective relationships with others and with intentional relationships with other things. The phenomenologist, then, is not studying the individual but is studying how a particular phenomenon manifests and appears in the lifeworld (p. 51).

This process of moving between parts and whole throughout the analysis of data is known as the hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1927/1982).

Both types of phenomenology are well suited to the study of professional learning. In this article, I will discuss research I conducted into secondary school teachers' professional learning needs in the International Baccalaureate program. Given my prior experience as a teacher in this educational program as well as a leader of professional learning, I felt it appropriate to adopt a hermeneutic approach to this investigation so that my existing knowledge of the topic could contribute to the interpretation of the phenomenon as described by the study participants. The remainder of this article will discuss how this methodology was used to provide valuable evidence of existing effective professional learning practice as well as recommendations for expanding these features to a wider audience of educators and schools.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of IB Professional Development

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is offered in thousands of schools around the world (International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2023) and seeks to provide an inquiry- and concept-driven approach to learning that fosters international mindedness and a

disposition to lifelong learning (IBO, 2019). Several studies have pointed out the need for effective professional development for IB teachers to understand and implement this challenging program (including Azzam et al., 2020; Christoff, 2021; Perry et al., 2018; Tsakiris et al., 2017), but little research so far has looked at this provision and how it can be further improved in the future (Lalwani & Fox, 2020).

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of professional growth for IB teachers as they sought to understand and implement the IB program and philosophy. To support this central aim, three sub-questions were devised to explore the topic in greater detail:

1. What are the professional learning needs of IB teachers?
2. What are the formal and informal professional learning activities in which IB teachers participate?
3. How and why do teachers choose which professional learning activities they undertake?

Peoples (2020) stated that the main research question in phenomenological investigations should focus only on lived experiences and, in addition, sub-questions can be utilized to provide insight into different aspects of this overall experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Before proceeding with the gathering of data, I undertook a review of selected literature. There is some disagreement on the appropriateness of this step in a phenomenological study (Fry et al., 2017). Despite this being a conventional element of research, providing valuable insight into previous findings on a topic, it has been argued that phenomenological researchers need to keep an open mind as they embark on a new investigation (Dunne, 2011). Given that this was a hermeneutic phenomenological study, however, and in agreement with Heidegger's (1927/1982)

belief that it is almost impossible for investigators to have a complete absence of knowledge or bias regarding a particular topic, I felt it appropriate and indeed necessary to review relevant literature as part of the study. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) argued that, in research that uses interviews as the primary data collection tool, it is vital for interviewers to have a thorough conceptual and theoretical understanding of the subject matter in advance, so that interviews can be designed with a particular thematic focus. Interviews that are not adequately focused, according to these authors, run the danger of providing only superficial or irrelevant data. Similarly, although theoretical frameworks are not used in transcendental phenomenology, at least in the data gathering and early analysis stages, given the importance of *epoché* or bracketing of presuppositions in unveiling the pre-conscious or pre-theoretical state of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994), they are possible in hermeneutic phenomenology (Vagle, 2008). I therefore adopted social constructivist theory as the framework for my study.

It has been suggested that phenomenological studies begin with the researcher being “swept up in a spell of wonder” (van Manen, 2016: 26). I began this project knowing only that I wished to learn more about effective forms of professional learning. As I explored the literature, and a clear pattern of models and elements related to effective adult and professional learning emerged, I began to question how these often-cited characteristics aligned with my own experience of professional growth as an IB teacher. Indeed, the examination of one’s own experiences, and the resulting assumptions these create, is an important part of hermeneutic phenomenology. Researchers are encouraged to keep a journal throughout the investigation, putting into writing their existing knowledge and prior experiences of the phenomenon to deliberately lay out inherent biases in a process Dahlberg (2006) calls “bridling” (p. 16). Journaling continues throughout the research process to keep track of changes in the researcher’s

thinking about the phenomenon, which naturally occurs as a result of reflecting on it (Gadamer, 2004).

Purposeful sampling is most often used in qualitative research because it allows the selection of participants with rich experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One type of purposeful sampling, criterion sampling, is particularly relevant in phenomenological research to ensure that all participants have experienced the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To align with the self-defined delimitations of my study, the criterion I adopted were that participants should be current teachers of the final two years of the IB program in a non-profit international school who had engaged in a range of professional learning activities. In keeping with the context of my study, it was also important to me to include participants with diverse cultural backgrounds and years of experience, and who taught in different subject areas. I therefore also made use of convenience sampling to ensure a heterogeneous group of participants. Guidelines suggest that phenomenological studies should include between three and ten participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and Charmaz (2006) recommended that data collection should cease when there are no new insights to be achieved. In keeping with these suggestions, I stopped collecting data when it was felt that saturation point had been achieved, and the final number of participants in the study was seven.

Interviews are the most common data gathering tool in phenomenological research (Vagle, 2018). In my study, I interviewed all seven participants in this study individually on a single occasion using the online application Zoom. Participants were able to choose the date and time for the interview and they could select the location where they felt most comfortable conducting the conversation. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) suggested that the value and relevance of the information gathered during interviews depends on the ability of the interviewer

to create a safe and relaxed space where the participant feels able to share private information that will later be shared publicly.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol with all participants, as recommended by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015). This protocol contained questions relating to the study's central research question and sub-questions and also suggested prompts to go into further detail on participants' responses. Vagle (2018) encouraged interviewers to open up the conversation through open questioning, which enables the researcher to continue the mindset of "wonder" (van Manen, 2016) that is central to the phenomenological approach. This also brings a disciplined naturalness to the interview experience, allowing participants to share a wealth of information that often ends up being relevant to the study (Giorgi, 1985).

My interview protocol was developed according to the framework suggested by Seidman (2013), although all the stages of Seidman's three-interview process were combined into one session. This framework started with an exploration of the participant's life history in relation to teaching in the IB program, then asked for detailed description of the participant's experience of IB professional development, and finally required the participant to describe the outcomes of their experience (i.e., the implementation of their learning). It should be noted that hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to investigate the concrete ways in which phenomena are experienced rather than participants' interpretations of them (van Manen, 2016), and this was reflected in the interview protocol. In other words, questions focused on actual experiences of the phenomenon rather than feelings, beliefs, or perceptions about them (Peoples, 2020). The interview protocol is provided in the Appendix.

I then manually transcribed the recordings, deleting unnecessary or irrelevant words such as repetitions and filler words like "um." For example, this was the verbatim statement made by

one participant: “Everybody was you know all about IB and how you know that it was the most marketable thing so yeah that's that's pretty much the simple answer.” This was rewritten as, “Everybody was all about IB and how it was the most marketable thing, so that’s the simple answer.” I then rechecked the transcripts while relistening to the recordings to ensure that all information was captured. Transcriptions are an abstraction: a translation of information from one form of narrative (oral speech) to another (written word), each of which entails its own conventions and cultures (Ong, 1982). As Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) pointed out, the researcher needs to pay careful attention to encapsulating as many nuances of the spoken word as possible in the written rendering.

At this point, I did member checking, with each participant being given a copy of the transcript to verify and edit as necessary. Only one participant pointed out a minor change to one word in her transcript, which was amended accordingly. Peoples (2020) advised that member checking is an important step in ensuring trustworthiness in phenomenological research but warned against asking participants to verify the interpretations. Giorgi (2006) explained, “Participants are surely privileged when it comes to what they *experienced*, but not necessarily concerning the *meaning* of their experience” (p. 358). For this reason, participants were asked for their feedback before rather than after the data analysis began.

Findings

While an extensive summary of the findings of this study is beyond the scope of this methods-focused article, a brief overview will be provided to demonstrate how the analysis of data, including the application of the hermeneutic circle, was conducted and how the findings were reported.

There are a number of different possible approaches to the coding of data in phenomenology. For my approach, I utilized the guidelines provided by Peoples (2020) for researchers writing phenomenological dissertations. The steps in this approach are:

1. Generating preliminary meaning units which reveal particular traits of the phenomenon in question.
2. Combining these preliminary meaning units into final meaning units (or themes) for each research question.
3. Synthesizing the final meaning units into situated narratives for each research question.
4. Synthesizing the situated narratives into a final general description to provide the answer to the main research question.

Although this appears to be a linear process, in fact the hermeneutic circle requires the researcher to reflect constantly on how the parts inform the whole and the whole informs the parts (Grbich, 2012). This means the researcher must frequently go back and re-reflect on participant data and identified meaning units to maintain the holistic meaning of the experience. Peoples (2020) therefore recommended the use of the term explication rather than analysis, which implies “investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Hycner, 1999, p. 161).

After reading through the first participant’s transcript several times to build an understanding of the whole, I broke up the account into parts by identifying 40 preliminary meaning units. Table 1 gives an example of this process.

Table 1*Example of Generation of Preliminary Meaning Units*

Participant Words	Preliminary Meaning Unit
<p>At first, I had to do quite a bit of reading and I think observations are pretty good. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and timetables that are designed, it has been quite difficult for me to be able to leave the classroom and go somewhere else.</p> <p>It's always a bit of a challenge to find time because it's not so much about the lack of time, but it's about the appropriate time. Because when I'm teaching, for instance, there is a teacher that I would like to team up with to do an IDU [interdisciplinary unit], and I can't see that teacher because we are teaching at the same time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning needs of IB teachers • Observing colleagues • Challenges to collaboration
<p>So those are the challenges. I teach in a small school; we are like 400 students altogether so hence in the secondary area we don't have as many. But it seems to be related to the fact that we always mention lack of time, but I don't mean the lack of time. We have the time, but the problem is the way we allocate the time is not correct. Then you end up trying to steal time. So you meet over the weekends or after school, trying to collaborate with other teachers. The collaborative part is really, really important.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to collaboration • School support for IB teachers • Self-initiated learning • Importance of collaboration

With subsequent participants, the same meaning units were used although minor amendments were made to some of the wording and a couple of new meaning units were added. To generate

the final meaning units, after all transcripts were coded, I grouped together the preliminary meaning units according to similar concepts, and then I sorted them into three main categories which aligned with the three research sub-questions. This process was informed by the hermeneutic circle, as I considered both relevant phrases extracted from the transcripts as well as the context of the whole of the participants' interview. The final meaning units are shown in Table 2. It should be noted that the software application NVivo was used to facilitate this part of the data explication process.

Table 2

Final Meaning Units

Research Sub-Question	Final Meaning Unit (Theme)	Preliminary Meaning Unit
1. Professional needs of IB teachers	• Becoming an IB teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Country of teacher training ○ Getting into an IB school ○ Non-IB teaching experience
	• Preparation for IB teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenge understanding IB requirements ○ Content knowledge in the IB ○ Learning about the IB ○ Learning needs of IB teachers ○ Teacher training preparation for IB

Research Sub-Question	Final Meaning Unit (Theme)	Preliminary Meaning Unit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses taught within the IB program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teaching multi-programs within IB ○ Teaching multiple subjects
<p>2. Types of professional development undertaken</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with other IB teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collaboration–content ○ Collaborative department culture ○ Community connections ○ Department meetings ○ Importance of collaboration ○ Mentors ○ Observing colleagues ○ Personal networks ○ School support for IB teachers ○ Sharing knowledge with others
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IB workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IB workshops attended ○ Online workshops–experiences ○ Workshops–content ○ Workshops–experiences ○ Workshops–making connections

Research Sub-Question	Final Meaning Unit (Theme)	Preliminary Meaning Unit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IB-related resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IB conferences ○ IBEN membership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to joining IBEN • IB examining as professional development ○ My IB ○ Subject guides
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Non-IB professional development ○ School workshops ○ Social media ○ Sustained, job-embedded learning
<p>3. Reasons for choice of particular professional development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access • Funding • Relevance • Time • Self-Initiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenges to attending professional development ○ Challenges to collaboration ○ Limitations of online resources ○ Go-to for questions

Research Sub-Question	Final Meaning Unit (Theme)	Preliminary Meaning Unit
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reasons for attending IB workshops ○ Reasons for professional development format ○ Self-initiated learning ○ Funding of professional development ○ School-supported professional development

At this point, I generated situated narratives, which consisted of organizing participants' experiences thematically for each of the final meaning units, quoting from participants' actual words to provide insight into each individual's experiences of the phenomenon. I then created general narratives, unifying participants' accounts into a general description of the most significant experiences for each set of themes which were grouped together to align with the three research sub-questions. In summarizing participants' experiences in this section, I used Peoples' (2020) guidance on the use of the words "most" (for saturated themes), "many" (for 50% or more appearance), and "some" (for unsaturated themes which were nonetheless relevant). The final step of the analysis was to write the general description, which moved away from individual participants' specific accounts and aimed instead to discuss the themes that were implicit in all or most of the participants' descriptions of their experiences. The objective was to

extract the common essence of the participants’ experiences in a cohesive general description and thus answer the overarching research question.

Throughout the process of data explication, I adhered to the procedures of hermeneutic phenomenology by journaling after conducting each interview and after extracting the meaning units from each transcript. Table 3 gives an example of a post-interview memo and an extract from a post-coding memo, in which I reflected on the meaning of the experiences described by the participant. This is an important aspect of bridling (Vagle, 2018).

Table 3

Examples of Researcher Journaling

Type of Memo	Journal Memo
Written immediately after interviewing one participant	<p>He learnt most of what he knows about teaching (in general and in the IB) from a former master teacher who he observed frequently.</p> <p>He has a few teachers who he relies on and reaches out to when he needs clarification or assistance—one is the moderator of the IB online forum, others are people he found himself who he has never met in real life.</p>
Written after extracting the meaning units from the same participant’s transcript	<p>He shows a strong capacity for seeking out learning opportunities for himself, rather than relying solely on provided workshops or school support. He uses his initiative to seek out people and places to provide the answers he’s looking for. He gave up his free time to observe an experienced colleague, and he has reached out to teachers in [name of city] and [name of country] who he doesn’t</p>

know, as well as a former workshop leader, to get guidance on teaching issues. He thus demonstrates himself to be a lifelong learner as well as someone who values learning from and with others.

In addition to journaling, I had made several assumptions in advance of conducting the study. According to Heidegger's (1927/1982) philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology, it is not possible for a researcher to set aside completely their previous experiences and beliefs. After presenting the findings to the main research question, therefore, I described each of these assumptions and provided evidence from the narratives to refute, confirm, or modify them. For example, I had the preconception that official IB workshops are not sufficient in themselves to guide the sustained professional growth that is needed to implement a new educational philosophy. This belief was based on several studies which showed that professional development needs to be ongoing and job-embedded (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) as well as my own experience as an IB teacher. My assumption was borne out in the findings to a degree, although participants were able to add more nuance. Workshops were most beneficial to teachers who had some IB experience because they could relate the learning to a context they understood, whereas this was not the case for new teachers, who found their first IB workshop to be overwhelming and confusing. At the other end of the scale, teachers who had been teaching the IB program for many years, and who had attended many IB workshops, mentioned that they did not feel they would continue to benefit from these events, unless it was focused on a particular topic or area where they still had questions or room for growth. By providing evidence from the participants' transcripts, I was able to examine my previously held bias about IB workshops and

reform my understanding of the extent to which professional development workshops are beneficial at different stages in a teacher's career.

Discussion

Phenomenology has been described as a challenging research methodology, particularly for novice researchers (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021), perhaps because, unlike other approaches, this tradition has its foundations primarily in philosophy. It is important for those considering this approach to fully immerse themselves in understanding the philosophical basis (Neubauer et al., 2019) and especially the differences between transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology. In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher brackets (or sets aside) their prior knowledge and beliefs about a phenomenon to provide an objective perspective of the participants' account of their own experience. In hermeneutic phenomenology, on the other hand, the researcher makes use of their own prior knowledge and experience of the phenomenon to inform their interpretation of the participants' descriptions. Both forms of phenomenology are valid and helpful, but the researcher needs to be clear on their own approach because the methodologies for each are different. In particular, the approaches to analyzing data vary, with the use of the hermeneutic circle encouraging a non-linear and more flexible approach to explicating data in hermeneutic phenomenological studies.

As a result of my phenomenological study, I was able to provide a rich description of the professional learning experiences of my participants within the IB program. In my findings, I used quotations from the transcripts to not only provide an audit trail, which is important for trustworthiness of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), but also to give voice to the people who experienced the phenomenon: the teachers themselves. Although it is possible in this type of research to provide only a summary and explanation of the meaning units identified (Peoples,

2020), using the actual words of the participants enables the “imageries and languages” (van Manen, 2016, p. 18) of phenomenology to be fully demonstrated. One of the strengths of this research philosophy/methodology is that the understanding is co-created by the participants and researcher together. The participants bear the “prereflective reflection” (van Manen, 2016, p. 18) of their experience, and the researcher utilizes the tools of phenomenology to find meaning in the totality of these experiences. Professional development has sometimes been criticized as something that is done to rather than for teachers (Korthagen, 2017), and phenomenology overcomes this challenge by bringing the participants’ voice and lived experience to the forefront of the investigation.

Phenomenology also provides the holistic approach to understanding the multiple components of professional learning that is so important for rigorous evaluation (Guskey, 2000). It allows the researcher to focus not on the individual teacher or isolated elements of their experience, but rather, through the use of the hermeneutic circle, to show how the phenomenon “manifests and appears in the lifeworld” (Vagle, 2018, p. 51). Heidegger (1927/1982) used the term *Dasein* to describe the concept that we cannot separate ourselves from the act of being within the world. This philosophy is helpful in providing a holistic account of the many factors that contribute to the process and outcomes of professional learning. It is valid for phenomenology to focus on the lived experience of the people who directly experience the phenomenon, the teachers themselves, while leaving other forms of research to look at the impact of the professional growth on students. Perceived or real value and impact are not measured by phenomenology, but the interpretation of the participants’ experiences provides valuable suggestions on ways in which professional development might be restructured or improved in the future. In my study, I was able to suggest ways for new IB teachers to build their

understanding of the program and its implementation through seeking out alternative forms of professional learning and collegial support beyond official workshops. I encouraged school leaders to organize various types of collaborative learning events, both within and between schools, and I provided recommendations to the IB Organization on possible ways to modify their online teacher website and workshop structure. These recommendations emerged from the lived experiences of the participants in the study, and I hope they will provide useful guidance to various stakeholders on how to improve professional learning so that practitioners feel supported and nurtured within this educational program. Phenomenology provided the holistic approach that enabled multiple factors of learning to be considered and gave voice to the people directly involved in the phenomenon.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

1. How did you come to teach in the IB program?
 - *Getting into an IB school*
 - *Length of time teaching overall and in IB*
2. What has been your experience of teaching in the IB program?
 - *Compare with previous teaching experience*
 - *Examples of positive and negative experiences*
3. What are some of the ways that you have learnt about teaching in the IB?
 - *IB workshops and category chosen*
 - *Social networking groups*
 - *Professional research (e.g., reading books/articles/IB documents, listening to podcasts, watching webinars)*
 - *Membership of IB Educator Network (IBEN)*
4. How did you come to choose these particular forms of professional development?
 - *Factors influencing decision (e.g., cost / access / mode / content)*
5. How does your school support your growth as an IB teacher?
 - *Support for collaborative time with colleagues (within department / with teachers from other departments / with educators from other schools)*
 - *Professional Learning Communities*
 - *Mentors*
6. How would you describe your professional learning experience?
 - *Examples of successful implementation of learning*

- *Barriers to implementation of learning*

7. Do you have anything else you would like to share with me about your experience of professional learning as an IB teacher?