THE MATTER OF EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING GOOD TEACHING IN AN INTERNATIONAL FIELD PLACEMENT

by

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Abstract

Many teacher education programs, like those in BC, depict good teaching as an epistemological concern, one that can be addressed by acquiring propositional and procedural knowledge during on-campus teacher education courses and, in turn, applying this knowledge in field settings (e.g., the practicum). Such a perspective marginalizes the knowledge and insights gained from the direct experience of teaching and depicts good teaching as an application activity situated in a theory-into-practice paradigm. In an attempt to better understand the contribution of direct experience to good teaching, this study explores the international field placement component of a Bachelor of Education program for six pre-service teachers. Specifically, it examines how the pre-service teachers understand and act on their ideas about what it means to be a good teacher as a result of a four week placement in BC Offshore Schools in Asia. This hermeneutic qualitative study draws upon Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (2004) notion of Erfahrung – an experience that interrupts understandings.

An analysis of the pre-service teachers’ experiences suggests that international field placements, such as those at BC Offshore Schools, can be a distinctive form of direct experience where the context provides both familiarity and strangeness – a relationship that both challenges and contributes to the participants’ thinking about the practice of good teaching in ways that may not be possible in regular BC field placements. Specifically, this study demonstrates that the pre-service teachers problematized three important dimensions of teaching: embedded Western values; universal applications of “good” pedagogy/“best practice”; and the pre-service teacher position within the field placement. These results have implications for the purpose and value of international field placement in teacher education.
Preface
This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Marian Riedel including the identification and design of the research program, performance of the various parts of the research, and analysis of the research data. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 4-5 was covered by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board as a project entitled *Interrupting a Complicated Conversation: Exploring the Experience of International Field Placements on Pre-service Teachers’ Understanding of Teaching and Education* and Certificate Number H14-00188, obtained February 5, 2014 under the Principal Investigator Anthony Clarke. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 4-5 was also covered by the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board as a project entitled *Interrupting a Complicated Conversation: Exploring the Experience of International Field Placements on Pre-service Teachers’ Understanding of Teaching and Education* and Reference Number 2014-008-UBCS-RIEDEL, obtained March 17, 2014 under the Principal Investigator Marian Riedel.
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Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my father who first inspired me to investigate what it means to be an educated person – you are an inspiration; to my mother (aka Omi) for being a constant source of support and care for my daughters (and me!) when I needed my study time the most; to my daughters for allowing Mommy time away from your childhood to pursue a dream and for reminding me every day to be a good person; and finally to my husband. Your unconditional support, love and unwavering confidence in my ability to pursue and complete this journey is without question the cornerstone of this project. You kept me laughing when I felt like crying, lifted me up when I was down, and replenished the beverages when needed most. Your Dr. Wifey did it (yeah!) and now I dedicate the future to us and our family.
CHAPTER ONE – THE POWER(LESSNESS) OF EXPERIENCE

I walk into the English language learners’ “extra help room” where I am volunteering during my practicum placement. It is late fall in southeast London; rainy and cold. I find a table where a recently arrived Rwandan refugee student is sitting. Her name is Uwimana. All I know is that this is her first formal school experience, and I can’t even begin to imagine what life had been like for her witnessing all the human atrocities I had heard about on the news. I smile, sit down beside her, and begin to wonder how she is coping with transitioning to life in England. Abruptly, my attention focuses on the teacher in charge who is explaining in detail the importance of underlining the title of one’s work. I listen intently in order to relay the lesson to the student. I turn to her and she shyly smiles back at me; I hand her a ruler and pencil, but she looks at me blankly and I realize she is unclear about what to do next. With my newly acquired knowledge on learning styles, I decide that a visual representation would be the best way for me to proceed. I show/teach her how to draw a straight line by simulating the act by running my finger along the edge of the ruler. She then takes her pencil and I immediately notice how she holds it: Her grasp seems clumsy, like something a toddler might do. I watch as she begins to draw her line: Instead of the pencil tip resting on the edge of the ruler, the tip is placed about a centimeter above the ruler’s edge and she draws a line that is complete, but it is squiggly and hardly represents the “neat and tidy” line the teacher modeled. Clearly my demonstration “teaching style” did not work. As I try to make sense of what I had witnessed, it occurs to me that my choice of teaching method was based on my assumption that this student could hold a pencil and understood how a ruler functioned. All of sudden, something I presumed to be a simple task was suddenly more complex than I ever imagined!

(Riedel, Journal Entry, 1994)

An Experience of Knowing

The above vignette describes an event from my own teacher education program that I now appreciate as a significant experience that helped me to learn about teaching. The understanding I gained in teaching what seemed to me to be the routine task of underlining a section of text was powerful because it demonstrated that, while teaching may be complex, above all else teaching involves relationships with unique individuals – a perspective I had never seriously considered until that particular experience. I recognized that I was working with another individual human being – indeed, a vulnerable person with a complex history. The student ceased to be “a refugee student” and began to be a unique person with whom I happened to be interacting – a student I was teaching who required me to think differently about my actions
and responsibilities as a teacher. The assumptions informing my actions were shaken by this experience (an encounter with a student who did not fit my preconceptions), and from that moment I became determined to avoid seeing students as being “generic” in the sense that they all had similar needs, abilities, and aspirations; instead, I tried to see individuals with unique backgrounds and histories. This experience shifted my understanding of teaching, and I began to realize that it was my responsibility to inquire into the uniqueness of those I was teaching and to respond accordingly.

I started to understand teaching differently, and began to develop a tentative understanding of good teaching. For many years, I appreciated teaching from the perspective of a student, that is, as a member of a class within a school; however, from my encounter with Uwimana I began to see teaching from the standpoint of working with unique individuals, and not with “classes,” “groups,” or even “students.” Behind my new appreciation of this particular experience “is an implicit theory of knowing, as well as values and beliefs about the nature of learning” (Britzman, 2003, p. 50). The experience of working with a particular 18 year old in London that day mattered greatly in developing my own understanding of good teaching.

I now see that my experience “led to transformative knowledge about the self and the social world” (Dewey, quoted in Britzman, 2003, p. 50). However, when recounting the experience upon returning to my university coursework, I found the understanding that I gained from my experience was becoming increasingly “dissociated from all that made [the] experience in the first place. . . . [separating] knowledge from experience and experience from knower” (Britzman, 2003, p. 51). Set within the context of the national curriculum introduction to secondary schools in the UK during the mid-1990s, my teacher education courses, particularly those focused on teaching methodology, presented teaching knowledge in “rigid directives that
demanded little else from the knower than acquiescence . . . and knowledge [was] expressed as static and immutable” (Britzman, 2003, p. 46). The standardized curriculum that I was learning about was “rigorously enforced, specifying in minute detail what [was] to be covered in primary and secondary schools . . . [and the] pedagogy of many lessons [was] being spelled out in detail” (Coulby, 2000, p. 17). The academic environment and local curricular context in which I was learning to teach made me doubt the value of what I learned that day, and as Coulby (2000) writes, made me feel that teachers, including pre-service teachers such as myself, could not “be trusted to determine what should be taught in schools nor how it should be taught” (p. 20). My lived experience was disconnected from the knowledge that I gained from the academy, and as Britzman (2003) summarized, this affected my understanding of teaching knowledge, theory, power and authority (p. 50). In short, experience no longer mattered.

**Experience Does Matter**

I have been a professional teacher for more than twenty years, mostly working in kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) international schools in Hong Kong. My current practice is situated within teacher education at a small teaching university in British Columbia as a teacher educator, advisor, and facilitator of international field placement. Throughout my interactions with students, as well as my teaching experiences, my assumptions were often shaken by interactions with students that did not fit my preconceptions; I tried to deal with such disturbances by talking with other teachers and by comparing their actions, beliefs, and experiences with my own. These accumulated encounters and relationships with students, colleagues, school contexts, etc., contributed to a shifting view of teaching in general, and good teaching in particular. My experiences as a teacher are of great importance and value as they provide “wholeness and complexity, continuity and development” (Higgins, 2010, p. 316) for me.
as a human being. In short, experience matters to me as it pertains to my continual development as a teacher and my understanding of good teaching.

Judging by the many conversations I have had with other teachers about the practice of teaching and what constitutes good – and bad – teaching, experience certainly informs how we develop and articulate our understandings of teaching. For example, when determining the goodness of a teaching strategy, my colleagues refer to particular classroom encounters and interactions with students to gauge and express how a particular strategy was good or bad. Indeed, various notions of good teaching generated by these conversations and collective experiences inform my own understandings. However, the biggest impetus for me to research understandings of good teaching in this study are the conversations I have had with pre-service teachers about their experiences, as well as knowledge gained (or thwarted), within their field placements.

Striking in these discussions is the prevalence of pre-service teachers’ worries about being good teachers during their field placement. Despite successful experiences in learning contexts (e.g., classroom volunteering, or previous classroom teaching experiences) being an admission requirement for our teacher education program, pre-service teachers generally do not value the understanding they gained from these experiences. Instead, their anxiety is often expressed as “I don’t know/have experience with the curriculum I’m expected to teach,” or “how am I going to plan and teach a lesson during the placement?” or “I don’t know or have experience with the ‘tricks of the trade’ to manage a class well.” Such comments seem to indicate that they believe that in order to be a good teacher, pre-service teachers should rely on propositional knowledge (i.e., factual/what teaching is) and procedural knowledge (i.e., how to teach) that can be learned in university and then applied to the classroom. Knowledge gained
from previous experiences of interacting with learners seems not to matter, or is quickly
discounted. Such a view is hardly surprising, since this is the approach taken toward fostering
good teaching – technical rationality – that seems to permeate most teacher education programs
(Ben-Peretz, 2011; Christou & Bullock, 2013; Martin & Russell, 2005). In short, good teaching
is generally understood as an application process in which the propositional and procedural
knowledge acquired on-campus is applied in K-12 classrooms, as Britzman (2003) concludes,
“[The] knower is perceived as incapable of changing or constructing knowledge. This
monological process constitutes training, not education, and lacks any theory about our creative
capacity to interpret reality and bestow this experience [of field placement] with multiple
meaning” (p. 46).

All of these factors impact the way in which pre-service teachers make sense of, interpret,
and construct their practice; as well as how they develop understandings of what constitutes good
teaching – a view that challenged the value that I placed on my own experiences of teaching.
Indeed, much educational research highlights this contradiction, and how the knowledge gained
by experience is devalued, marginalized, and often readily dismissed in teacher education.

The Powerlessness of Experience

The following section provides a review of pertinent literature relating to key concepts
informing conceptions and knowledge of good teaching that dominate teacher education
programs, contributing to the devaluation of teaching experience. Broadly speaking, literature
from three areas informed my work: 1) teacher education and teacher knowledge; 2) field
placement, and 3) international field placement and globalization. I draw on this literature to
argue that conceptions of good teaching point to a particular relationship between experience and
good teaching. In sum, the literature generally depicts good teaching as an epistemological
concern, one that can be solved by acquiring propositional and procedural knowledge in teacher education courses and, in turn, applying this knowledge in classroom settings (e.g., field placements). Such a perspective ignores the kind of knowing that teachers, and by extension pre-service teachers, often end up valuing the most: the understanding gained through the direct experience of teaching. Reflecting on my own experience, I came to know and understand good teaching to be an activity “among people [i.e., students] in multiple and diverse social [i.e., classroom] settings” (McGregor, Sanford, & Hopper, 2010, p. 299). The formal knowledge I gained in my studies as a pre-service teacher within the academy was valuable, but did not guarantee my success in practice. Thus, instead of finding certainty in acquiring propositional and procedural knowledge, I often encountered competing and conflicting notions of what counted as good teaching – reflecting different values and ideals of the purpose of education in various classroom contexts. In consequence, I came to understand good teaching to mean “[involving] both epistemological and ethical concerns” (Coulter et al., 2007, p. 4).

Furthermore, to paraphrase Higgins (2010), it was from inside my practice, my direct experiences with teaching, that I learned the “most substantive lessons about what is good, admirable, and meaningful” (p. 301) in teaching. General teaching knowledge and technical teaching skills did not form the sole sources of my understanding of good teaching; direct teaching experience also served as a key resource.

Ek and Macintyre Latta (2013) point to the marginalization of direct experience in learning to teach:

Severing curriculum enactment from its physicality and materiality promotes classroom practices void of epistemological and ontological considerations. The result is that little attention is given to assimilation, internalization, and integration of teacher/student
thought, structuring curricular experiences that compartmentalize knowledge, separating pedagogy from content, knowledge from interests, and, thus, theory from practice. (Ek & Macintyre Latta, 2013, p. 85)

This marginalization limits the opportunities for pre-service teachers to work out for themselves, in relationship with others and in direct experience with students in the field, an understanding of good teaching. Nevertheless, such literature also represents the inherited language available to articulate understandings of good teaching within teacher education; it continues to frame good teaching as knowledge that is testable, certain, universal, and value neutral that “makes some ways of saying and doing [good teaching] possible, it makes other ways of saying and doing [good teaching] difficult and sometimes even impossible” (Biesta, 2006, p. 13).

**Teacher Education and Teacher Knowledge**

In Canada, teacher education is offered at 62 institutions (Association of Canadian Deans of Education [ACDE], 2014). Programs vary across the country and from institution to institution; all are embedded in a complex framework of regulatory bodies including provincial governments, accreditation organizations, and universities (Gambhir, Broad, Evans, & Gaskell, 2008). Currently, all programs are largely course-based in educational faculties with the B.Ed. degree or equivalent, forming the basic academic credential. Teacher certification, however, is the responsibility of provincial or territorial jurisdictions, with the academic credential forming the key prerequisite for professional accreditation in Canada (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Van Nuland, 2011). BC offers programs at nine institutions (British Columbia Ministry of Education Teacher Regulation Branch [BCMETRB], 2015) and produces about 7% of Canada’s teachers (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).
Generally, initial teacher education curriculum within the academy in Canada is composed of a combination of coursework representing primarily propositional knowledge about who is to be taught (the learners), what is to be taught (subject matter and curriculum), where it is to be taught (context), why it is taught (foundations of teaching) and procedural knowledge of how is it to be taught (principles, practices and methods of teaching) (Gambhir et al., 2008, p. 15). As Russell, Martin, O’Connor, Bullock and Dillon (2013) outlined, a theory-into-practice approach is “the fundamental framework. . . implicit in the pre-service teacher education programs throughout North America” (p. 10). The goal seems to be to teach propositional and procedural knowledge to pre-service teachers who are expected to subsequently apply this knowledge unproblematically in practice settings.

Christou and Bullock (2013) explained that teacher education programs are “by and large, founded on the principle that teaching is inherently a problem-solving activity” (p. 20) and “everyday [teaching] practices are seen as an end in themselves rather than as a means to achieve something greater” (Portelli & Konecny, 2013, p. 100). Consequently, learning about, exploring, and understanding good teaching is cast primarily as an epistemological concern that privileges general good teaching knowledge as holding the key/solution to contend with the particular interactions encountered within the classroom. Good teaching involves the pursuit of the best/right practices and techniques as designated and learned in the academy to solve problems in the daily practice of classroom teaching (the field) (Bullock, 2011). As such, the approach marginalizes “learning from first-hand [direct] experiences . . . [or from] listening to oneself and to one’s students” (Russell et al., 2013, p. 11). This, in turn, creates the perception that teaching practice can be constructed by focusing on measurable learning objectives and decontextualized outcomes, as opposed to examining one’s own experiences. By extension, this perception frames
the generation of “new” teacher knowledge as knowledge stemming from gold-standard scientific research where knowing is based on “insights and data that can be accurately measured or verified by empirical scientific methods” (Gordon, 2007, p. 40). This new knowledge (formed within the academy) further supports a conception of teacher knowledge as predominantly propositional and procedural knowledge and excludes “other important sources of knowledge” (Gordon, 2007, p. 40). Not surprisingly, pre-service teachers come to rely on and revere propositional and procedural general knowledge in determining what counts as good teaching.

For the pre-service teacher, good teaching therefore becomes a “quest for certainty [and] search for recipes” (Gordon, 2007, p. 39) that will allow them to contend with particular experiences of the classroom while the theory underpinning knowledge of good teaching in general involves the “process of constructing general formulas for action . . . [that] promote ready-made formulas for teaching and learning that can be applied” (Portelli & Konecny, 2013, p. 99). In consequence, good teaching is understood to be the amassing of many such formulas, along with the knowledge of how and when to apply these formulas for success. Such a view allows good teaching to be considered a process of knowledge transmission, achieved through the application of “best practices,” providing a “perspective of technical rationality [that] mask[s] the many ways in which challenging and engaging teaching represents a highly disciplined view” (Loughran & Russell, 2007, p. 217). Frustratingly, teacher education and teacher knowledge is reduced “to a skills-orientated training model. . . . Both teacher educators and [pre-service] teachers, via the explicit procedures and expectations [reproduce] the dominant conception of theory and the concomitant slavish relationship between theory and practice, which is reasserted in schools” (Portelli & Konecny, 2013, p. 100). Consequently, the process of “becoming a teacher [is] no more than an adaptation to the expectations and directives of others.
and the acquisition of predetermined skills – both of which are largely accomplished through imitation, recitation, and assimilation” (Britzman, 2003, p. 46).

However, as Schön asserts (quoted in Christou & Bullock, 2013), “the situations of practice are . . . characterized by uncertainty, disorder, and indeterminacy” (p. 20), something pre-service teachers soon realize cannot be overcome by amassing and applying extensive procedural and propositional knowledge. The assumption that putting a particular theory (i.e., of propositional and/or procedural knowledge) into practice such that it “works” unproblematically is not what is experienced by pre-service teachers once they are in the field. The dominant theory-into-practice framework of teacher education creates the expectation for pre-service teachers that “the general precepts developed in advance [of the field placement/direct teaching experience] through theoretical and empirical inquiry are valid and sound [and] can be universally applied to any and all given contexts to bring about particular results” (Portelli & Konecny, 2013, p. 99).

Field Placement

As a key element of teacher education programs, the field placement component is where pre-service teachers participate in supervised and evaluated teaching situations in classroom settings (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Gambhir et al., 2008). It becomes the opportunity to put theory-into-practice where the university is regarded as “the place where [good teaching] knowledge was discovered and the [field placement] school [is] the place where it [is] applied” (Eisner, 2002, p. 378). Such a conception has dominated teacher education for the past century, which, since the normalization of teacher education, has supported a model of on-campus theoretical studies followed by off-campus field placement (Vick, 2006). This arrangement favours “developmentally focused and incrementally organized [direct] experiences [italics in
original quote] that move on a linear continuum from simple to complex. . . , emphasis[ing] the study of an external reality that is then reinforced and practiced” (McGregor et al., 2010, p. 298) – in short, a technical-rational approach to learning to teach.

However, extensive literature highlights that the field placement is the most significant and valued aspect of teacher education for pre-service teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005) and, as Russell et al. (2013) point out, the field placement is also the first time pre-service teachers are exposed to learning from their direct experience of teaching. Supposedly, the field placement is where procedural and propositional knowledge are tested in the real world of the classroom; however, when confronted with the demands of classroom life, the “compartmentalized knowledge that student teachers inherit does not seem so fixed and immutable . . . [and becomes] undone” (Britzman, 2003, p. 73) with each new interaction. In particular, with the direct experience also being “shaped in powerful ways . . . [where] learning can be constrained by advice from an experienced teacher and a university supervisor” (p. 12), pre-service teachers often ignore “that which does not fit with what [they] expect to find, assimilating the strange to the known” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322) during field placement. As a result, the field placement often does not become an opportunity to learn, or gain valued experience; instead, experience is quickly marginalized and masked by propositional and procedural knowledge. Complications that may arise as a consequence of engaging with the particulars of working in relation with individual students engendering a process of “reducing the repleteness of the real [direct experience] to bullet points” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322), an approach that negates what pre-service teachers directly experience for themselves and further biases good teaching as the application of knowledge taught as part of their university coursework.
In effect, rather than an opportunity to explore propositional and procedural knowledge in relation to the real world of practice, the context of the field placement (including supervisory practices) often reinforces the idea of good teaching as a techno-rational, quantifiable, skills based activity. The learning gained from the direct experience of teaching is not used to explore the complexities, judgements and individual relationships that inform good teaching. Nor is direct experience seen as an opportunity for “teacher candidates to identify what it is they need to learn in order to become the kind of teacher they set out to be” (Russell et al., 2013, p. 15). As Palmer (1998) notes, technical-rationality as a “mode of knowing has become normative . . . even though it misleads and betrays [pre-service teachers] when applied to the perennial problems of being human that lie beyond the reach of logic” (p. 62) as, for example, when working in relationship with a particular student within a specific context at a particular time. Direct field placement reinforces the determination of good teaching as based in the application of best/right practices and techniques or abstract expert knowledge to solve the problems of the classroom. The understanding gained by the direct experience itself is rendered largely irrelevant.

Finally, despite the claim that the field placement is where pre-service teachers can “practice [teaching], take risks and explore their learning in a safe environment that is rich in feedback and support” (Gambhir et al., 2008, p. 20), the field placement can instead be an experience of replicating – in a high stakes environment – the propositional and procedural knowledge taught during on-campus coursework. Goodness of teaching, including action taken as a teacher, is determined in right/wrong dichotomies, and is measured in relation to correctness or incorrectness of the faithful application of the technical teaching skills previously taught on campus. Theorizing and exploring one’s own biases, beliefs and assumptions about what
constitutes good teaching, in the pursuit of learning to live well with others, is marginalized or dismissed altogether in the techno-rational approach.

I am not suggesting that the inclusion of field placements, or a curriculum foci on what, who and how to teach is not important, or should be removed from teacher education programs; rather I am highlighting that pre-service teachers’ understanding gained via the direct experience of teaching is often marginalized and rendered irrelevant in the overall process of developing a conception of teaching, along with what it might mean to be a good teacher working in relationship with other human beings. The field placement experience is “a fundamental value in the process of becoming a teacher . . . ; [however, it] is so taken for granted that the underlying structures and assumptions that authorize it are rarely interrogated” (Britzman, 2003, p. 49). As a consequence, experiential knowledge becomes disassociated from knowledge within the academy, and an important learning opportunity is lost: an “epistemology of experiential knowledge contends that teachers [and pre-service teachers] are actively involved in the creation of their own professional knowledge. . . [and that] technical rational assumptions underlying most teacher education programs do not prepare candidates to learn from experience” (Bullock, 2011, pp. 34-35). The compartmentalization of teacher knowledge “thwarts the development of critical relationships to knowledge and stalls the awareness that things could be different and that action can be taken to make that difference” (Britzman, 2003, p. 53).

However, what if direct experience amplified an important, yet neglected, source of understanding what counts as good teaching? What if direct experience supplemented or challenged propositional and procedural knowledge? To draw upon Higgins (2010), one could articulate a different process of understanding:
In order to see what a [teaching] situation demands, I must view the particulars of the situation in light of general notions of good and right [notions that could be explored within teacher education courses]. Without the aid of such generalizations, which make salient and organize the particulars I notice, I would confront only chaos. And yet my generalizations remain vague and uninstructive until I encounter them in a ‘particular practical situation’ [i.e., field placement]. Without a general sense of [good teaching], for instance, I would not be able to understand a particular event as [not good teaching], but at the same time, it is not until I work through [emphasis added] whether or not this really counts as [not good teaching] that I begin to grasp what [good teaching] can mean.

(Higgins, 2010, p. 320)

However the problem with such an approach is that teacher education and direct field placement experiences provide little or no opportunity for pre-service teachers to work through for themselves what counts as good teaching. Helping pre-service teachers to problematize their own understandings and direct experiences requires “more from teacher preparation than simply ‘training’; it requires educative experiences purposefully embedded in meaningful pedagogical situations [italics in the original]” (Loughran & Russell, 2007, p. 222) where conflicting notions of education in particular contexts can be analyzed and tested both privately and publicly by pre-service teachers.

Britzman (2003) concurs:

Indeed, the knowledge of school practice is devalued because it is contingent, situated, and resistant to unitary truths, immutable laws, or universal generalizations. School knowledge is thus seen as disruptive to the push for unitary knowledge. The problem is
not that unitary knowledge is disrupted. Rather, it is with how dominant conventions valorize knowledge as if it was unencumbered by interests and investments. (p. 55)

Teacher educators need to ask pre-service teachers to surface and reflect on their own fundamental ideas, the taken for granted understandings and interpretations of what constitutes goodness in teaching. These are critical elements on which judgements about good teaching and learning are based. However, these ideas, as Egan (2001) points out, become part of what we think \textit{with} when we think \textit{about} good teaching and education. Consequently, these ideas often go unnoticed and unrecognized within contexts that generally use a technical-rational approach to teaching. However, how might field placements experienced in local or international locations support or foster possibilities for pre-service teachers to explore, examine and theorize understandings of good teaching in ways that are not easily achieved in local contexts? Specifically, and in relation to the current study, how might an international field placement allow pre-service teachers to approach understanding good teaching as necessarily “problematic in its social construction . . . [and] question, how do we know what we know?” (Britzman, 2003, p. 58). Might the assumptions which inform understandings and knowledge be disturbed in productive and generative ways?

\textbf{International Field Placement}

More recently, \textit{international} field placements have been offered in teacher education programs with some Canadian institutions “experimenting with international practica as a potential site for the professional and personal development of teacher candidates” (Culligan & Kristmanson, 2014, p. 63). Existing research on these projects focuses on impacts, such as cultural and global awareness, that prepare pre-service teachers to cope with today’s diverse classrooms (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Merryfield, 2000;
Myers, 1997; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009; Willard-Holt, 2001). In sum, the potential professional and personal development highlighted in the literature on international field placement is framed as a response (or solution) to calls for support for today’s increasingly culturally diverse classrooms: With “students from different backgrounds and ethnicities . . . [there is the expectation that] teachers must be equipped to prepare all students for their roles in this diverse world” (ACDE, 2005). Research supports this call (Buczynski, Lattimer, Inoue, & Alexandrowicz, 2010; Lee, 2011), however, good teaching within the international field placement context is generally still situated as the application of propositional knowledge (namely one focusing on what culture exists within the host location) and procedural knowledge (namely how one is to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds). Good teaching remains an “external reality that is then reinforced and practiced” (McGregor et al., 2010, p. 298). The assumption seems to be that the more reinforcement and practice one has, the better one’s teaching will become. Thus, despite the call for more research documenting pre-service teachers’ experiences of international field placements (Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2009; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), much of the current research speaks to a theory-into-practice conception for international field placement, which is almost identical to how local BC field placements are often conceptualized. Thus, enhancing cross-cultural knowledge, awareness, sensitivities and skills, new knowledge of good teaching is perceived to lead to increased professional competence (Maynes, Allison, & Julien-Schultz, 2012) but seemingly with little critical analysis by participants (i.e., pre-service teachers) of the underlying premises upon which this good teaching is based. As Ben-Peretz (2011) notes, this new focus has simply resulted in globalization being added to the existing propositional knowledge within teacher education programs, whereby international awareness is now a part of on-campus coursework that can be
applied to international contexts. The international field placement is now framed as a “means to an end” to achieve a predetermined outcome (e.g., global awareness, multiculturalism, or diversity).

Once again, the [international] field placement is regarded as another “discrete and arbitrary unit” (Britzman, 2003, p. 51) to be aligned with a theory-into-practice model of teacher education. The educational challenge resulting from this model lies in the absence of consideration of the actions of good teaching, as well as the marginalizing of opportunities for pre-service teachers to question or problematize the multiple, conflicting notions of what constitutes education and good teaching in a different context such as an international field placement. Due to how field placements are usually conceptualized – an opportunity to apply, test and replicate theory/understandings of good teaching – there are missed opportunities for pre-service teachers to problematize understandings and judgements about good teaching, given the possibilities inherent in an international field placement (Brumberger, 2007).

Furthermore, little has been written about how or whether pre-service teachers construct understandings of good teaching and action during an international field placement. Little to no research points to international field placements as being sites for pre-service teachers to question, “How do we know what we know?” (Britzman, 2003, p. 58) or “How might the direct experience of international placement inform or challenge assumptions embedded in notions of good teaching?” Additionally, do such direct experiences provide enhanced opportunities for pre-service teachers to try out competing, or even conflicting, understandings of good teaching? Finally, even less has been written from a Canadian or BC standpoint about Canadian student teacher international placements, and virtually nothing has been written about BC Offshore School experiences. My research therefore addresses this significant gap in the research
literature. In summary, conceptions of good teaching within international field placement are framed primarily as the application of propositional and procedural knowledge – conceived as external truths which “can be either discovered, traced, acquired or reproduced” (McGregor et al., 2010, p. 298) – in field placement settings. From the perspective of teacher education and international education, such a conception shapes how understandings, interpretations and applications of good teaching can be explored within an international field placement.

The historical and dominant conception of teacher education as a techno-rational activity – one also bolstered by positivistic orientations to teacher knowledge (Eisner 2002; Russell et al., 2013) and educational research (Biesta, 2007) – does not invite pre-service teachers to explore their ideas about good teaching during their field placement. Personal experiences of teaching are rendered almost irrelevant and of little consequence when the experience of teaching “is tightly bound (in both time and space), rationally constructed, and efficiently controlled by a theory into practice regime. Experience becomes not organic, interactive, and continuous but rather something scripted, timed, and located” (Roberts, 2005, p. 15). This is contrary to my own understandings of good teaching, and as Britzman (2003) notes, learning to teach is deeply implicated and embedded “in the lived lives of teachers, in values, beliefs, and deep convictions enacted in practice, in the social context that encloses such practice, and in the social relationships that enliven the teaching and learning encounter” (Britzman, 2003, p. 64).

However, what if pre-service teachers were in settings that were one step removed from local and historically inherited contexts? What if the tight controls of the pre-service teacher experience were relaxed? How might this interrupt pre-service teachers’ current understandings, conceptions, practices and judgements involved in determining goodness and how to act well within teaching? Finally, what if we attended carefully and gave power or voice to the
understandings gained via such direct experiences of teaching for pre-service teachers during an international field placement?

**Researching Experience**

To explore how experience may “achieve continuity – where the past and present transact to create the future . . . [where] the meaning of such a transaction is directly correlative to the connections [understandings] we make in the process” (Roberts, 2005, p. 17) – and to address the problem of good teaching being understood solely as an application activity positioned in a *theory-into-practice* paradigm with techno-rational, skills based, conceptions of good teaching, I propose to explore the contribution of an international field placement to the professional development of pre-service teachers within the context of a Bachelor of Education program. Specifically, my study examines how six pre-service teachers question, understand, and act on their ideas about what it means to be a good teacher as a result of participating in an international field placement at a BC Offshore School. By exploring interpretations and judgements of good teaching, as understood by pre-service teachers engaging in a direct experience of teaching in contexts outside of familiar BC placement contexts, namely within an Asian BC Offshore School environment, I offer a response to Britzman’s (2003) statement that “student teachers rarely have the space and official encouragement to consistently theorize about their lived experience” (p. 64). I propose that an experience of teaching outside of a familiar BC field placement may provide such a space.

However, with “experience” as a key aspect of my research, I need to signal what I mean by the concept. Experience in teaching is generally a vague term, understood as the accumulation or quantity of time spent teaching in classrooms without qualification of the quality or goodness of that practice. Nevertheless, “years of experience” is one criterion
frequently used to distinguish expert from novice practitioners (e.g., as a justification for progressive salary structures in a comparatively non-hierarchical profession). Needing a more robust conception for my project, I therefore turn to hermeneutics and especially the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) to argue for two concepts of experience in teaching, Erlebnis and Erfahrung, that I address in detail in chapter two. In brief, Erlebnis describes daily events “that conform to our expectation and confirm it” (p. 347), while the defining quality of Erfahrung is “not confirmation of expectations . . . but precisely disconfirmation” (Higgins, 2010, p. 323). Erfahrung involves an interruption to understanding which “means that hitherto we have not seen the thing [such as good teaching] correctly and now know it better” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 347). Gadamer (2004) notes that Erfahrung experiences are often uncomfortable as they make us feel that we are “being pulled up short” (p. 270), but at the same time the experiences are also “articulated by the notion of a ‘learning experience’ that . . . serves to negate our previous views” (Warnke, 1987, p. 26). I use these dual perspectives of “experience” in my research to explore how an international field placement may inform understandings of what good teaching means in teacher education.

My study is also informed by the many conversations I have had about good teaching and field placements, along with my previous direct experiences as an international teacher and my current professional practice involving international field placements. My own international teaching and teacher education experiences are key sources of understanding, informing my own ideas of good teaching, as well as providing a source of inspiration to research such experiences. Furthermore, since I am often called upon to share my insights and general knowledge with pre-service teachers hoping to teach overseas, my research may become a point of connection with both pre-service teachers I teach, and colleagues I work with. This wider, more global teaching
background has also resulted in my being responsible for the planning, organization and enactment of international field placements at BC Offshore Schools for pre-service teachers.

Ironically, despite my lack of direct experience with BC Offshore Schools, my colleagues assume I know more about such field placements based on my greater (in relation to my colleagues) direct international teaching experiences. For that reason, I am presently the facilitator and recruiter of participants for the International Practicum Placement (IPP) program at my institution.

The program itself is often interpreted by my colleagues as providing a great opportunity for participants to gain direct teaching experience in a more global context. At the same time, in my role as an advisor for the teacher education program, about a third of the inquiries I receive from potential pre-service teacher applicants are from those who perceive the IPP program as an asset for securing future employment. I gain immense pleasure from my role in supporting international field placement at my institution, as I very much enjoyed my own direct international teaching experience.

The IPP concept was originally conceived in 2010 when the Dean supported two pre-service teachers in the pursuit of a field placement at a BC Offshore School in China because he thought it would be a good direct teaching opportunity, consistent with the institution’s internationalization goals. International field placement represented (and continues to represent) an experience that supports a general understanding of what it is to be a part of a “global community” (Vancouver Island University [VIU], 2015b) in the 21st century. Following suit, I arranged for six participants in the spring of 2012 and four participants in 2013 to undertake similar direct experiences. This study involves the six participants from the spring 2014 IPP program. Thus, as an individual who has engaged with multiple contexts of teaching and
education both inside and outside of Canada, and with my current professional practice situated within teacher education and international field placement, I became increasingly curious about the potential contribution an international field placement experience might make to pre-service teachers’ understanding of good teaching.

By employing research methods situated within dialogue, such as focus groups, face-to-face and remote interviews, and self-reflection on actions and beliefs held about good teaching, my study included six participants, participating in a four-week international field placement in BC Offshore Schools located in Asia. Participants were interviewed individually before, during, and after their placements. They also took part in pre- and post-placement focus group interviews, and submitted (via email) bi-weekly e-journal reflections on elements of familiarity and strangeness encountered. While the literature on international field placement for pre-service teachers is thin, I hope to add an understanding of how pre-service teachers interpret such placements and generate knowledge and understandings of good teaching that emanate from such an experience. This kind of direct experience is foundational to the overarching question posed by this study: How might a direct experience of an international field placement at a BC Offshore School inform understandings of good teaching? Such a context may provide pre-service teachers with significant difference/strangeness while at the same time sufficient familiarity to engage substantively as teachers during a short-term field placement. The specific research questions for this study are:

- How is good teaching understood at the outset, during and at the completion of an international field placement?
• How have understandings of good teaching been interrupted and/or confirmed as a result of the international field placement, and what kind of direct experiences prompted these shifts?
CHAPTER TWO – RESOURCES FOR EXPLORING EXPERIENCE

In response to my own direct experiences of international teaching and with my current professional practice situated within teacher education, my interest is in good teaching; how it is interpreted, understood and acted upon for pre-service teachers who have participated in an international field placement. My foray into this area did not follow a positivist approach with predetermined questions ready for data collection, rather my journey has been a back and forth process between my own particular experiences of teaching and my own general understanding of good teaching. There is/was no “definite starting point [rather] it [has] been provocations that emerged from [my professional] practices” (Lund, Panayotidis, Smits, & Towers, 2012, p. x), provocations from both my past and the present contexts that make up my current understanding of good teaching that spurred me on to explore pre-service teachers’ understanding of good teaching. It is with this stance in mind that I turned to philosophical hermeneutics – specifically that articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) – as a framework to understand both my own ideas about good teaching, as well as those of the pre-service teachers participating in international field placements within the context of this study.

Hermeneutics

In contending with the multiple contexts in which I directly experienced teaching, beginning with my own teacher education field placements in England, to English language teaching in Japan, followed by numerous years in international schools in Hong Kong, through to my current context of teacher education in BC, I struggled to faithfully apply the propositional and procedural knowledge from my own teacher education coursework to the particular teaching contexts in which I found myself. The notion of an “objective” or neutral understanding of good teaching was not something I directly experienced, yet within the staffroom conversations and
professional development workshops I faithfully participated in to become a “better teacher,” I struggled to express the disconnect between the promises of new propositional and procedural knowledge and my experience in the classrooms. In turning to hermeneutics, I found language to articulate how it is I came to understand good teaching.

Gadamer’s (2004) philosophy of how it is that human beings come to understanding resonates with my own experiences of understanding good teaching. His account of hermeneutics “not only incorporates an account of changing understanding but also leads us to expect it” (Moules, McCaffrey, Field, & Laing, 2015, p. 33), which is how I came to understand, and continue to understand, good teaching. The positivism of the mid-twentieth century saw both the natural and the human sciences as objective sciences where understanding arose from developing and proving causal hypotheses. In short:

Social scientific findings were to be repeatable in the same way as natural scientific experiments and in both cases objectivity was to mean an elimination of subjective intrusions: explanations were to be based on adherence to rigorous scientific methods so that the effects of differences in imagination, interpretive talent or individual perspective could be minimized. (Warnke, 1987, p. 2)

Such an articulation of understanding echoes my conversations with pre-service teachers who seem to be searching for teaching methods and practices that are rigorous, bias-free, and where personal perspectives are all but “removed” from their practice. It also speaks to an understanding of good teaching as the application of procedural and propositional knowledge, both of which underpin the conceptions of knowledge taught within various teacher education courses.
However, this perspective does not align with my own conceptions. For myself, understandings of good teaching developed largely from direct experiences of teaching – ways of being and actions as a professional – that are combined with my propositional and procedural knowledge, or general knowledge. In summary, I “can only understand the parts [of good teaching] in terms of the whole [of good teaching] and vice versa [italics added]” (Higgins, 2010, p. 321), allowing me to make sense of teaching and how I decide which actions would be best (or good) in a particular situation. Of course such situations always involve other people, often especially vulnerable people (i.e., children); I am always working in relationship with others, inquiring about the unique “selves” of my students, actively inquiring about their contexts, histories and perspectives. Such a process invites conversation about the uncertain, conflicted and indeterminate aspects of teaching. Thus, to pursue “the good requires a special kind of openness . . . [where opening] one’s mind proceeds only through the slow and sometimes painful process of extending, refining, and amending one’s generalisations, not through jettisoning them” (Higgins, 2010, p. 320). An example from my teaching practice may help to illustrate this point:

**Plagiarism: A Hermeneutic Interpretation**

I draw from a recent discussion on plagiarism I had with a class of pre-service teachers. It began when one of them mentioned that they had caught a student in their field placement classroom copying, or plagiarizing, portions of an assignment from the Internet. The pre-service teacher judged that a “good” teaching method to cope with this situation was to give a grade of zero, reasoning that the actions followed school policy, which in turn supported the idea of work that was not original to the student did not deserve any credit. Almost unanimously, the other pre-service teachers in the class enthusiastically agreed with this judgement, and some even
recalled stories of receiving grades of zero as a result of similar actions during their own secondary school coursework. They concluded that plagiarism was dishonest and akin to stealing from someone else and such an act is simply wrong and deserved to be punished, for example, by being given a mark of zero.

The understanding of this direct experience, as publicly expressed by my pre-service teachers, speaks to the idea that individuals can own knowledge, an interpretation that was supported by the school policy: The “good” or “correct” choice of action was confirmed by the perceived certainty, universality and value neutrality of official propositional and procedural knowledge that was “objective” and “neutral”. No debate, discussion or exploration ensued (or at least not within the confines of the public conversation taking place amongst the pre-service teachers in my course) about the choice of teaching action or the possible assumptions, biases or values informing the action.

In response, I shared a story based on my own direct experience as a secondary teacher in Hong Kong. I, too, was faced with a student whom I caught plagiarizing portions of an assignment from the Internet; initially I followed a similar reasoning pattern as my pre-service teachers. I gave a grade of zero to punish the student, and called in the parents to discuss the “theft.” My goal was to teach the student that stealing was simply and objectively wrong, and I assumed that the punishment of a zero grade, the accepted and expected “rigorous” method of academic punishment applied within the school in such situations, would discourage the student from such acts of plagiarism in the future. Like my preservice teachers, I concluded that my choice of actions was “good” as it was an “objective” way of showing the student that intellectual thought is the possession of the individual who conceived it. Such individuals deserve, even require, recognition of their work should another individual wish to use their
thoughts and ideas. Failure to do so constituted theft. However, in speaking with the student’s parents, it became clear that my understanding of plagiarism in general was based on different assumptions than those of the student and his parents.

First, from the parents’ perspective, the act of plagiarism was their child’s response to the fear of being found out as incapable of completing the assigned task. The incident was a matter of “saving face” for the student, and an ethical concern for the parents who wanted their child to do well and be accepted as a capable member of the class. Furthermore, the use of plagiarism was understood by the parents as an act of self-protection, and a coping strategy for not being a native English speaker; the parents (and the student) believed that the original author’s words could articulate meaning better than the student’s own words. Termed “patchwriting,” the use of an author’s original words to convey meaning is “an essential developmental stage for [English as a Second Language] ESL writers” (Howard, 1995, quoted in Amsberry, 2010, p. 36). Second, I was also told that “imitation, memorization and repetition are valued as effective learning strategies for acquiring and displaying authoritative knowledge” (Hu & Lei, 2012, p. 818). Thus, my student’s actions of plagiarism were not deemed to be wrong or bad by the parents; rather, their son was acting as a “good” student in trying to learn about the concepts I was teaching by displaying the knowledge that he found on the Internet.

As I pondered these perspectives, I found it difficult, if not impossible, to ignore the particular perspectives of the parents and how their views did not affirm my own understandings of plagiarism in general. Consequently, I began to see that the act of plagiarism by the student was not, as I had assumed, an act of laziness and unwillingness to exert the effort to complete the assignment, or a disregard of the original author’s ownership of thought. In order to support this particular student in a particular situation at a specific point in time, I had to problematize my
own conceptualization of plagiarism in general. In doing so, I also came to question the assumptions of goodness I expected from my actions as a teacher trying to help a particular student learn about plagiarism. Consequently, my interpretation of the event altered what I knew or believed was true and right about my general understanding of plagiarism and the goodness of my particular actions to contend with it. In some ways this new knowledge was disconcerting, that is something “that cannot be, until [I] slowly and painstakingly re-wire [my] sensibilities to allow its due” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322). From that point forward, my general knowledge about plagiarism and subsequent teacher actions changed. I had to act differently in relation to the new knowledge I gained from this direct experience.

Indeed, my experience of plagiarism in a new context pushed me to explore my own self-conceptions. My Western based schooling perspective, the perspective which framed my understanding of plagiarism and scholarship while teaching in Hong Kong, made me realize that plagiarism as I conceived it did not value or support memorization, repetition and imitation as “good,” since these concepts were not in support of an “epistemological emphasis on originality, self-generated knowledge, and individual creativity” (Hu & Lei, 2012, p. 818) that inform the acquisition of knowledge in the West. Upon further investigation, I became aware that the notion of intellectual property rights and the subsequent determination of plagiarism are very Western concepts; after all, the word plagiarism links back to the Roman poet Marital who expanded upon the Latin word plagiarius (kidnapper) to indicate the theft of words, as well as slaves (Howard, 1995). I also became aware that the Asian tradition of Confucianism, with its collectivist emphasis, “advocates open and broad access to knowledge as common heritage” (Shi 2006 quoted in Amsberry, 2010, p. 32) which results in different attitudes and values towards
text ownership. The two conceptions of knowledge proprietorship resulted in different
determinations about what might be understood as “good” or appropriate in a given context.

My direct experience of plagiarism in this new context was incompatible with my
Western notions of individualism, originality, authenticity, and proprietorship of knowledge.
New events in an unfamiliar setting disrupted the “truth,” or general knowledge, of my previous
understanding of plagiarism based on my own history, culture and language. Aspects of my own
history allowed me to notice certain particulars about the event of plagiarism while making me
blind to others: I let my generalisations “frame the particular situation, and make it readable,
while at the same time reading carefully enough that [my] generalisations [became] informed
and reformed by the very particulars they stretch to encompass” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322).

As a result of being made aware of some of my biases and assumptions about plagiarism,
I was able to discriminate between the knowledge that informed my general notions of
plagiarism (propositional and procedural knowledge) and the knowledge gained from a direct
experience of a plagiarism incident with a particular student. I became aware of the normalizing
impact my general knowledge of plagiarism had on my choice of “good” action as teacher. The
direct experience of plagiarism within a context outside of my Western history and culture
showed me that the student’s actions could also be interpreted as “good;” as I learnt from my
conversation with the student’s parents. I also came to understand that assigning a grade of zero
did little to support the student’s general understanding of the assignment, or to facilitate
learning around plagiarism and intellectual honesty. Consequently, I was forced to call into
question the claims to truth that I had made about the student’s actions in the first place, as well
as my own “good” actions. My realizations made the choice of deciding what the “correct”
teaching action in this incident much more complex, and surfaced different understandings and
actions of good teaching. My past and present direct experiences and general understandings were comparable, but they were clearly incompatible and incommensurable in light of the new direct experience I had in Hong Kong.

In summary, the knowing or understanding outlined in this example was acquired via direct experience. Such knowing cannot be replicated or tested via positivistic scientific methods; rather, the understanding made “its presence felt when one happens onto something . . . [and] it eludes the hegemony of method” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 8). It was only through dialogue with the student’s parents – a dialogue in which I was willing to put my assumptions into play “while trying to remain open to those moments in which [I found myself] noticing just a little more than [I] thought [I] knew how to notice” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322) – that enabled me to compare my understanding and interpretations of the situation with others, and subsequently change my interpretations, understandings, and actions accordingly.

In the subsequent section, I will use various Gadamerian resources to illustrate how I came to understand an aspect of good teaching through the direct experience of plagiarism in Hong Kong. These resources were also used in the current study to examine how pre-service teachers come to understand good teaching through the direct experience of international field placement.

**Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics**

Philosophical hermeneutics – and especially Gadamer’s hermeneutics – provides new resources to help me understand both my own teaching and how pre-service teachers in an international field placement create their own understandings of good teaching. In contrast to the demand for an objective research method, namely the positivistic scientific methods “considered to be the sole guarantee of validity” (Grondin, 1994, p. 108), I am drawn to Gadamer’s
hermeneutics where “truth is not only, nor even initially, what can be guaranteed by a method” (Grondin, 2003, p. 22). As I will explain below, the “truth” around a good teaching practice to contend with the plagiarism encounter was not revealed to me via the application of a “best practice” taught to me during my own teacher education program, or reached via extensive “evidence-based” research (although all of these helped to frame my general understanding of plagiarism). Instead, I directly experienced the truth of plagiarism and how to contend with it by working in relationship with a particular student, with particular parents, in a particular context.

In his magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (2004), originally written in German in 1960, Gadamer places understanding at the very centre of his philosophy, with understanding forming our primordial way of being in the world (Bernstein, 1983, p. 34). He begins with the problem of judging goodness in art and demonstrates that truth is not reducible to a set of abstract criteria, rather, truth is an event “or experience in which we find ourselves engaged and changed” (Barthold, 2012, “Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002),” para. 4). Specifically, Gadamer suggests three elements in hermeneutics which can be best understood “as the triunion of understanding and interpretation with application in one integral unit” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 185). In other words, how we interpret our experiences affects our understanding, and may alter how we act in the world. Gadamer describes a circular/cyclical process, where dialogue is a key element:

> Only in conversation, only in confrontation with another’s thought that could also come to dwell within us, can we hope to get beyond the limits of our present horizon. For this reason philosophical hermeneutics recognizes no principle higher than dialogue.

(Grondin, 1994, p. 124).

In trying to understand the plagiarism incident, I needed to interpret the direct experience as it occurred, which included engaging with others in order to learn their perspectives on our
shared experience. Subsequently, my understanding of the event changed as I brought to bear the new information I gained via dialogue and, as a result, this new understanding caused me to alter my actions, my practice of teaching, in order to support the student’s learning about plagiarism.

However, as Gadamer notes, “understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject [plagiarism and practice of teaching in my case] because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 296). Thus, it is not that I achieved an ultimate understanding, or absolute truth, of plagiarism and good teaching practices to contend with it, rather my understandings and actions shifted. As Bernstein (1983, p. 231) outlines, hermeneutics moves the conversation, and opens alternate ways of thinking about how we make claims to truth or goodness.

Using Bernstein’s (1983) words, my direct experience in Hong Kong highlighted that understanding concepts of plagiarism and good teaching are incompatible and incommensurable in that I could not “make a point-by-point comparison or translation or discover something which is the generic concept of [i.e., plagiarism] of which [there] are exotic species with clearly defined differentia” (p. 96), or an ultimate true representation. Rather, truth and goodness are determined in dialogue where we can compare what may be incompatible and incommensurable claims to truth (my student’s action) and the goodness of my teaching practice to contend with his plagiarism. For me, the dialogue allowed me to “gain the type of self-knowledge that is achieved whenever we realize that something that we have thought was obvious, universal and intuitive may not have this epistemological character at all” (p. 96). What became clearer were the judgements I made around my own practice to teach, and my awareness of those understandings.
Finally, I learned that dialogue “in which there can be genuine mutual participation and where reciprocal wooing and persuasion can prevail” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 228) can promote new truths and understandings: My knowledge of plagiarism, and good teaching practice in relation to it, became provisional within the context of such dialogue and consequently shifted my understanding.

Gadamer’s perspective on hermeneutics speaks to an ontology of understanding. Such a way of being implies “the continuing formation of the self in the light of experience, beyond the sheer acquisition of experiences” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 46) leading to a cultivation or development of the self, a process that requires being open to experiences. In my case, the direct experience in Hong Kong highlighted new possibilities of understanding (in this instance, about plagiarism) and judgements about the goodness of my actions as a teacher. Direct experience is crucially part of the formation process of my own practice of teaching. As I reflect on past direct experience as teacher, teacher educator, and researcher, my understanding of good teaching continues to change as new possibilities of understanding emerge with each experience. Such knowledge is not predetermined or predictable (I did not plan or know I was going to encounter the new possibilities of understanding at the outset), but rather is gained through being open to experiences; a form of leaning that is often marginalized within formal teacher education.

Seeking resources to frame my research led me to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer (2004) provides important resources to address my concern that good teaching can be addressed by amassing and applying propositional and procedural knowledge to actual practice. My own direct experience in the plagiarism incident illustrated how my understandings, interpretations, and actions were specific to the context in which the event occurred, and were implicit in my own biases and embedded within the traditions I used to
understand plagiarism. It was only by remaining open to conversation with others that my understanding and choice of action were interrupted. In an attempt to make sense of my direct experience, I moved back and forth between what I understood from my past and what I was being exposed to in the present encounter – a cyclical process that ultimately allowed me to create new understandings of plagiarism and good teaching.

In investigating international field placement in teacher education, I am guided by own understanding of the topic. Adopting a Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutic lens helps me to see that understanding “things (such as the practice of teaching, teacher education, international field placement, etc.) come from somewhere: they are not simply fabricated . . . [and] hermeneutics requires a bringing forth and a bringing to language of something new” (Moules, McCaffrey, Morck, & Jardine, 2011, p. 3). By investigating how a direct experience of an international field placement at a BC Offshore School might inform understandings and judgements of good teaching, I too will bring forth language of something new. Specifically, I will use the following Gadamerian resources to frame how six pre-service teachers from a small teaching university begin to interpret, understand, and act on their ideas of good teaching.

**Gadamerian Resources**

Teaching, like philosophical hermeneutics, is “an interpretive practice that occurs in a shifting in-between, in the middle of relationships, contexts, and particularities” (Moules et al., 2011, p. 2). I contend that Gadamer’s (2004) philosophical hermeneutics provides useful resources from which to frame how individuals create understanding and make judgements. With limited research and literature on international field placements framed from a Gadamerian hermeneutic perspective, below I will outline how the following resources helped me to examine my direct experience of plagiarism and understandings of good teaching that emerged. I begin
by addressing the *historical conditioning* of my general understandings and actions, followed by exploring the *prejudices* and *traditions* that informed and normalized my general understandings and my choice of actions. Next, I will highlight how particular forms of *dialogue* and the *hermeneutic circle* allowed me to confront and interrupt my general understandings, allowing for the exploration of new, or different *horizons of understanding* of plagiarism, and subsequent actions.

I should note, while these aspects of Gadamer’s (2004) philosophical hermeneutics are unpacked discretely and outlined sequentially, “they do not exist separately, nor can one element alone explain how the interpreter [I] arrive[ed] at understanding. . . each will only be understood when the entire array of elements is laid out” (Decker, 2004, p. 48). Thus, in my own desire to understand myself and how I arrived (and continue to arrive) at an understanding of good teaching, I attempt to articulate how a direct experience of plagiarism interrupted my existing understanding of plagiarism. When brought to bear on the interpretation of the direct experience itself, the experience shifted not only my understanding of plagiarism and good teaching, but also my actions as a teacher.

**Historical Conditioning, Traditions, Prejudices and Horizon of Understanding**

Central to Gadamer’s hermeneutics is the temporal dimension of understanding (Moules et al., 2015, p. 37). Events, such as my encounter with plagiarism in Hong Kong, are interpreted from perspectives inherited from our historical context, creating the historical situation in which we find ourselves, and thus we “should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 300). In this sense, history had a grip on my ability to interpret the event of plagiarism, while also informing my choice of good teaching actions to contend with the event
since “every thought, every feeling, and every action [was] influenced by [my] prior knowledge and experiences” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 18). Similarly, the pre-service teachers with whom I shared my story, are equally under the influence of their own previous understandings and historical contexts when interpreting and determining actions for particular interactions and events during their field placements. As outlined earlier, this includes normalized understandings of education and schooling, the particular context of formalized teacher education in BC, their understandings of the teaching practice, as well as that of plagiarism and ownership of thought.

Warnke (1987) summarizes:

[We] understand history not simply because we make it but also because it has made us; we belong to it in the sense that we inherit its experience, project a future on the basis of the situation the past has created for us and act in light of our understanding of this past whether such understanding is explicit or not. (p. 39)

Gadamer’s (2004) notion of historical conditioning frames not only the understandings of schooling and education, teacher education, and field placements, as I have outlined above, it also frames individual understandings of good teaching for the six participants in my study. Such understanding is not unconditional: “[Our] understanding stems from the way in which the event or work has previously been understood and is thus rooted in the growth of a historical and interpretive tradition” (Warnke, 1987, p. 78). Thus, as I have already begun to do, my interpretation of international field placement requires me to attend to the history and traditions of the topic, in addition to inquiring about how the six participants constructed their ideas of good teaching.
By exploring my participants constructions of good teaching and the historical conditions that frame their understandings of practice, teacher education and international field placement, I try to attend to the “assumptions and expectations that provide our initial orientation to that which we are trying to understand” (Warnke, 2002, p. 315). I attempted to understand in relation to what is familiar, as did the six participants in my study. I did not begin to address plagiarism from a “blank slate,” and neither did the study participants arrive at their international placements without their own preconceptions. Understanding an event (such as plagiarism) “is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which the past and present are constantly mediated” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 291). We are all influenced by multiple, often conflicting, traditions that act as normalizing forces in situating our understanding (such as my own notions of individualism, originality, and proprietorship of knowledge did for plagiarism). Such traditions influence, or prejudice, our orientation to understanding and “the recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 272). Consequently, such prejudices influenced my understanding of plagiarism, my interpretation of my student, and my choice of actions.

However, in being open to other possibilities, and after engaging in conversation with the student’s parents in Hong Kong, my prejudices became more apparent. The direct experience of plagiarism outside of my historical condition, allowed me to surface different or alternate perspectives on my understandings of good teaching in general. Just as Gadamer (2004) contends, it was in foregrounding and appropriating my own fore-meanings and prejudices that I became aware of my own biases, allowing the direct experience of plagiarism to assert a different truth from my own fore-meaning (pp. 271-272). In investigating the direct experience of international field placement of the study participants, I contend that Gadamer’s resources of
historical conditioning, tradition, and prejudice can help surface general understandings of teaching and learning of the study participants, and orientate how they come to interpret the direct experience of an international field placement, which in turn may result in shifts of understandings and actions.

For Gadamer (2004), prejudices and traditions establish a horizon of understanding, from which situations are, and can be, understood. Consequently, total understanding by an individual “can never be completely achieved” (p. 301) since contextual details are continually changing and are often in conflict. Understanding is, therefore, finite as the particular present of a situation does not represent particular presents of the past, nor can representations of future presents be fully predicted. The situation itself represents a particular standpoint with a “range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301). In relation to my direct experiences in teacher education, however, understandings of good teaching are often presented as ultimate truths situated in dichotomies of right or wrong, best or inferior practices. There is little to no room to contend with the historical conditioning, prejudices, or traditions informing these understandings in general.

However, as my direct experience in Hong Kong highlights, an individual’s vantage point, such as mine on plagiarism, is not permanent/eternal: with each new encounter, “traditions and prejudices are brought fourth anew, opening the possibility that a new interpretation or meaning could result” (Decker, 2004, p. 52). We are “in the flux of history, under the multifarious influences of our time and place” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 38) and thus understanding is only partial, as time continuously presents new possibilities for understanding. From a hermeneutic perspective, understanding “can never be completely achieved . . . not due
to a deficiency in reflection, but to the essence of the historical being that we are” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301). In other words, no final truth is possible.

Accordingly, each new teaching experience for pre-service teachers should bring new possibilities of meaning and interpretation. With field placement being seen by pre-service students as the most important element of teacher education (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012) and pre-service teachers regularly rating “practicum experiences as the most significant component of their teacher education programs” (Dillon et al., 2014), the many conversations I encounter around the field placement clearly support this view. However, as I have outlined earlier, knowledge gained from direct experiences is often marginalized in teacher education and even by pre-service teachers themselves:

Many students discredit their own experiences as they place more authority with those who have experience and speak with confidence and assertion about what it takes to teach. Students are hesitant to validate and have faith in their own experiences as a guiding basis for knowledge [italics added] and professional development in their teaching practice. (O'Connor, Nickel, & Sterenberg, 2015, p. 13)

In Gadamerian language, the horizon from which to explore understandings of good teaching is currently largely interpreted from a perspective in which propositional and procedural knowledge determine what is the “right” way to understanding good teaching. This horizon dominates my pre-service teachers’ dialogue when they talk about their field placement; in addition, they often refer to the same traditions and prejudices that made up their own direct schooling experience as K-12 students. Rarely are these underlying assumptions or prejudices challenged in open conversation. The purpose of my study, however, is to explore how direct experiences of an international field placement might contribute to understanding good teaching.
In doing so, I look to surface and examine alternate *traditions* and *prejudices* about teaching and learning, as well as *horizons of understandings* of good teaching that may differ from what has been directly experienced within the BC context. However, in exploring the interpretations of the knowledge gained from such direct experiences, I need to attend to another key Gadamerian resource, that of dialogue and an openness to new possibilities.

**Dialogue and the Genuine Conversation**

Central for Gadamer (2004) is language, since it is the medium by which understanding is made public; however, since “no pronouncement can exhaust what is seeking to be said – the infinity of wishing-to-be-said” (Grondin, 2003, p. 146-147) – language is always speculative and finite. Thus the language, or words, I had as a resource to express my understandings of plagiarism, for example, were informed by Western traditions. My language was “contingent and partial” (Grondin, 2003, p. 136).

However, it was in conversation with the Hong Kong parents, participants in a conversation who were “not two separate rational agents starting every conversation as if from nothing, but beings who are speaking out of *traditions* that precede them, using words that are already saturated in cultural meanings” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 41), that my prejudices and cultural traditions were made visible to me. I entered the conversation with my student’s parents with a particular understanding of what plagiarism is, an understanding that was coloured by the Western traditions of my own schooling experiences and understandings of originality and proprietorship of knowledge. The same might be said for the parents, who began our conversation with non-Western traditions affecting their understandings of originality, proprietorship of knowledge, and interpretations of their child’s actions. Our ideas about these
concepts were made apparent, brought into being, via conversation, highlighting competing, and
often conflicting, interpretations of the student’s actions.

However, in order for me to see possibilities for alternative understanding about
plagiarism and good teaching, I needed to be open to other ideas, that is, adopt a believing
perspective, as opposed to a kind of doubting or challenging perspective, where I only look to
refute the ideas of others. Such a perspective of skepticism is one that Elbow (1986) argues the
Western intellectual tradition tends to bias as “we tend to assume that the ability to criticize a
claim we disagree with counts as more serious intellectual work than the ability to enter into it
[italics added] and temporarily assent” (p. 258). Thus, to challenge this tradition of doubt or
skepticism, believing calls for more acceptance or tolerance of alternate perspectives in an
attempt to build upon the understanding of others (Burbules & Bruce, 2001) as opposed to
focusing on overcoming or defeating them. Dubbed the “believing and doubting” game, it
challenges the aggressive questioning and critique of doubting. By beginning with the believing
game, one promises to see and experience the perspective of the other. It is the “only hope of
seeing something faint that is actually there which [the other] is good at seeing, but the rest of us
are ill suited to see” (Elbow, 1986, p. 259); such a perspective embodies the openness that
Gadamer (2004) refers to in engaging in alternate perspectives. While believing and doubting
may appear to be in conflict, they are “both necessary and complementary . . . [in] an
environment that fosters trust, listening for understanding, the expression of multiple
perspectives and risk taking” (Wade & Moje, 2000, pp. 5-6). For Gadamer (2004) such an
environment can foster a particular form of dialogue.

Thus, the dialogue which I engaged in with the Hong Kong parents took on particular
characteristics, “a coming-into-being of the thing that escapes from the control of the
participants” (Grondin, 2003, p. 127) as new understandings of plagiarism, good teaching and actions emerged between us. As much as the conversation between the parents and me was initiated at my request, the new understandings we created were an outcome of the nature of our conversation, a conversation where:

[One] word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion . . . [where] the partners [participants] conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one [specifically me in this event] knows in advance what will ‘come out’ of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us . . . [which] shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it—i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists).

(Gadamer, 2004, p. 385)

I did not know in advance that these understandings would emerge, but from that point forward (including the most recent conversation I had with the pre-service teachers in my course), I questioned my own judgement about whether a grade of zero for plagiarism constitutes “best practice.” I formed new understandings of plagiarism and good teaching.

Gadamer referred to this as a genuine conversation, one that is driven by attention to the subject matter being discussed. The purpose of such a conversation is:

[Unraveling] a truth in regard to a particular subject [which] may not involve consensus or agreement but [importantly] involves a commitment on the part of the conversation partners to remain in the conversation with the aim of gaining insight, not simply to confirm what either already holds to be true. (Moules et al., 2011, p. 94)
In my direct experience of teaching, “conversations” are more often focused on confirmation or reaffirmation of predetermined truths, that is, as one pre-service teacher described, a monologue in which you are spoken at or to, but certainly not with. Genuine conversation requires an openness to the subject matter being discussed and to each participant involved. It also requires the recognition (and belief) that what each participant has to say may also be “right.” For me, this meant being open to the parents’ perspective on their son’s plagiarism, staying focused, and allowing the subject matter to drive our conversation, and recognizing that my interpretation of the event may differ from theirs, a stance that “means risking our prejudices by putting them into play, while trying to remain open to those moments in which we find ourselves noticing just a little more than we thought we knew how to notice” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322).

However, opportunities for genuine conversations to challenge our own prejudices and traditions in teacher education and perhaps create new understandings with others, are limited by teacher education’s focus on propositional and procedural knowledge, that is, forms of expert knowledge that the initiated (faculty) transfer or deliver to the uninformed (pre-service teachers) in lectures or monologues on “learning to teach.” Dialogue in the form of a genuine conversation is only possible when each party is able to contribute to the conversation, for example, when discussing direct experiences. Conversation, then, is “a way of knowing – a way of accessing knowledge – and understanding is reaching through discourse and negotiation about the meaning of the lived world with others” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 33). In short, experience can matter.

The notion of “understanding,” as interpreted via Gadamerian resources, is historically affected and situated within traditions that form prejudices from which an individual interprets the object/situation. Such an understanding can be brought into being via language expressed in
a genuine conversation. For Gadamer, such a conversation takes on key characteristics, summarized by Moules et al. (2015) as deep listening, openness and truth: Participants “remain in the conversation with the aim of gaining insight, not simply confirm what either already holds to be true . . . [where listening] is done to explore, question further, and understand . . . [in] searching to find a truth in what the other is saying” (pp. 93-94). The process itself is not a linear one, rather a circular one, sometimes “visualized as a spiral to represent the widening of the ‘whole’ as it is informed and shaped by each partial understanding or viewpoint that lends a new association to the topic and adds to it connectedness in the world” (Moules et al., 2011, p. 44).

In summary, the genuine conversation was central in shifting my own understandings of plagiarism and actions as a teacher contending with it. It also remains at the heart of this research. I see the Gadamerian resource of genuine conversation as not only a tool to interpret the direct experience of an international field placement for pre-service teachers, it also situates/informs my research methodology in that this project aims to be an enactment of a Gadamerian genuine conversation whereby I use various Gadamerian philosophical resources (historical conditions, prejudice, traditions, openness to the other, and the hermeneutic circle) in seeking the understanding of good teaching for study participants. Thus, my challenge lies in providing opportunities for participants to participate in genuine conversations which includes recognizing the position of authority I hold in the dialogue by the virtue of my role as the researcher and professional, by asking good questions that allow conversations to be driven by the subject matter being discussed, by remaining open to what participants have to say, and by holding in abeyance, or at least being conscious of, my own biases and the extent that they do not close down or restrict the conversation. With this in mind, I attend to how it is such conversations continuously revise our understandings: “to reflect on both our assumptions and
our ideas of reason and to amend them in the direction of a better account” (Warnke, 1987, p. 170). For Gadamer, this is a curricular moment of understanding “from parts to whole and from whole to parts” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 40) known as the hermeneutic circle.

**Hermeneutic Circle**

The hermeneutic circle refers to the idea that “construing the meaning of the whole [means] making sense of the parts and grasping the meaning of the parts [depends] on having some sense of the whole” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 112, quoted in Kinsella, 2006). The circle is not formal in nature, subjective or objective, rather it describes Gadamer’s point that understanding is “always from the parts to the whole and from the whole to the part, thus fulfilling the hermeneutic circle” (Liu & Sui, 2014, p. 763). Thus in understanding the plagiarism incident in Hong Kong, I understood the particulars (or parts) of the incident (i.e., the particular student, his particular actions, his parents’ particular explanations for his actions, etc.) in terms of my own general (or whole) understanding of plagiarism and vice versa. A continual process that was “constantly augmented by new information, and the process of understanding [was] fueled by this continuous stream of information” (Kinsella, 2006, p. 4). Or as Gadamer (2004) notes, “the circle is constantly expanding, since the concept of the whole is relative, and being integrated in ever larger contexts always affects the understanding of the individual” (p. 189). Similarly, my circle expanded as a consequence of encountering difference in Hong Kong, the familiarity of plagiarism was transformed by, to paraphrase Kerdeman (1998, p. 246), continuous interplay between the whole I already knew and the new parts that surprised and challenged me. “This can be a messy process, but one that recognizes the complexity of understanding” (Kinsella, 2006, p. 4). As such, the hermeneutic circle is a resource which articulates my own process of understanding and informs how the notion of understanding is used in my study.
The understanding sought in my study is circular, and consists of a “circular tension between the familiar and the strange” (Kerdeman, 1998, p. 247) as both the study participants and I make meaning by integrating particular parts, or particular direct experiences, into larger general contexts. Our dialogue focused on this tension and implies that each participant has a different starting point for interpretation that will lead to different understandings of good teaching. Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle provides a resource which highlights the idea that meaning will ensue, but meaning that is particular to the direct experiences, as well as the histories, traditions, and prejudices of each unique individual participating. It also provides a perspective for the analysis of the circular movement of direct experiences (the parts) and the general understandings of good teaching (the whole) in seeking how the experience of an international field placement informs understandings of good teaching. In so doing, however, I return to the human experience of being in the world, and what Gadamer means as a unit of meaning in the human sciences.

Certain Forms of Experience – Erfahrung and Erlebnis

Given my aim to research how a direct experience of international field placement can contribute to the development of pre-service teachers’ understandings of good teaching, I need a robust concept of experience for my project. Fortunately, Gadamer supplies one – but one much richer than the usual notions of “practical contact with and observation of facts or events” or “the acquisition of knowledge or skill over time.” I follow Gadamer, who, in turn, echoes Aristotle in believing that “it is a mark of an educated person to look in each area for only that degree of accuracy that the nature of the subject permits” (Aristotle, 350 B.C./2000, p. 5). Gadamer worries about the reach of modern science and the reduction of all knowing to the product of “scientific method” and his search for a response leads him back to Aristotle and the recovery of
some of Aristotle’s distinctions beginning with the nature of truth: “while we should begin from things known, they are known in two senses: known by us [i.e., political and ethical matters that are true for the most part], and known without qualification [i.e., the natural world and matters that are true without exception]” (Aristotle, 350 B.C./2000, p. 6). Gadamer contends that the domination of natural science has come at the expense of the human sciences and that attempts to recover the distinction between the two must begin by exploring the role of experience in understanding.

Gadamer explains that in the natural sciences, experience accumulates inductively to the point that certain or absolute knowledge (i.e., procedural or propositional knowledge) can be created and then the particular events or experiences are left behind: “The purpose of experience is …[to generate] knowledge of the concept” (Risser, 1997, p. 86) such as a mock teaching activity focusing on lesson introductions, or hooks, where all peer feedback is in relation to the same expectation (i.e., the lesson introduction used clear and concise language or instructions for the team work activity were delivered well allowing students to move into groups quickly and quietly).

In the human sciences, experience also accumulates, but particular experiences remain discrete and are never collapsed into a single concept; nevertheless, experiences can coalesce into understandings that are true or good “for the most part,” such as when pre-service teachers learn to read interactions of the classroom to better guide how a lesson plan may need to be adjusted (or abandoned all together!). Gadamer (2004) explains that experiences so construed “stands in ineluctable opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge” (p. 350). Indeed, the consequence of gaining such experience is not secure knowledge, but increased openness to new experiences and greater
humility. Indeed, Gadamer explains, “genuine experience is experience of one’s own historicity” (p. 351).

Within the confines of this document, I have thus far qualified the term experience as direct experience in relation to participating in the acts of teaching and the route “to get at the immediacy of what it is to be a human being in the world” (Moules et al., 2011, p. 44). However, such direct experience, according to Gadamer (2004), is distinguishable in two different ways: “experiences [Erlebnis] that conform to our expectation and confirm it, and the new experiences [Erfahrung] that occur to us . . . [which] means that hitherto we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better” (p. 347). Erlebnis can be described as simply whatever happens to us, such as today I walked up the stairs to my office, I placed my bag on the floor, put my lunch on the shelf, switched on my computer, etc. In this situation, we act like “informal data collectors . . . and an experienced person is someone who has seen enough of a something [say good teaching] to be able to make trustworthy generalisations about it” (Higgins, 2010, p. 323). By extension then, the longer one has lived, the more experience one accumulates.

On the other hand, Erfahrung describes precisely that which stands out from the everyday predictable impression of events and senses. The defining quality “is not confirmation of expectations leading to trustworthy generalisations but precisely disconfirmation” (Higgins, 2010, p. 323). As Gadamer (2004) describes, Erfahrung is always negative as it highlights “we have not seen the thing [such as plagiarism and my understanding of good teaching] correctly” (p. 347) and this alters our understandings when we see through a “deception and hence make a correction” (p. 348); in short, the “negativity of [Erfahrung] has a curiously productive meaning” (p. 347). Thus “experience” is both confirmation (Erlebnis) and disconfirmation (Erfahrung).
No experience is completely \textit{Erlebnis} or \textit{Erfahrung}. For example, all experiences include both familiar and unfamiliar elements: some elements must be somewhat familiar for us to recognize them as experiences and all experiences are in some way unique (if only in time and space). In sum, Bernstein (1983) points out, “Gadamer seeks to show that there is a truth that is revealed in the process of experience and that emerges in the dialogical encounter with tradition” (p. 152).

In relation to my study, I drew extensively on this dual perspective of “experience” as a resource from which to frame direct experiences of teaching. For example, throughout my study confirming experiences were framed as “familiar”. In English, such an \textit{Erlebnis} perspective also positions experience as something that is accumulated or acquired over time. Conversely, interrupting, or \textit{Erfahrung} experiences were framed as “strange”, and particularly how strange/\textit{Erfahrung} experiences interrupted understandings and informed or influenced new understandings of good teaching. Although this outline seems to imply that I “applied” the terms in opposition, or in a binary conceptualization, there was a great deal of shifting back and forth between the German and English use of the words. As a German and English speaker, I found it difficult to work in either the exclusive German definitions of the words or in my English translation of the words as there is, after all, only one word for “experience” in English and two in German. As Gadamer (2004) notes, “the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have” (p. 341).

In relation to my direct experience of plagiarism, I did not enter into a dialogical exchange with the student’s parents with a blank slate; rather, I arrived with a general understanding of plagiarism based on my own historicity and it was the ensuing conversation that interrupted my understanding. It was the \textit{genuine conversation}, in which I risked my \textit{prejudices} and remained open to trying to understand how the other directly experienced
plagiarism. In short, I left “behind a belief to encounter the anomaly that would challenge it or the repleteness that would expand it – and the return to [myself] with [my] ideas revised and enlarged” (Higgins, 2010, p. 323). In doing so, my insights (or knowledge) revealed a deeply ingrained general understanding of plagiarism and a reliance upon procedural and propositional knowledge to inform my determination of good teaching to contend with it. The insight revealed to me that my initial actions had not been made in relationship with the student, or in relation to the specific needs of a student and what it was that he required to succeed at the task assigned by me. This thwarted my previous understandings of good teaching. I felt guilty and upset at my choice of actions, and judgement of “good” practice. I felt that I had cheated the student in supporting his learning and then I further punished the student (by giving a grade of zero) with little thought as to alternative interpretations of his actions. I also felt cheated by the school polices that I was following, as I thought that I was doing the “right” thing, but the rules themselves were not appropriate in this particular case, nor did they align with my new understanding of the situation as it was revealed in conversation with the student’s parents. Nonetheless, I gained knowledge about myself, my understanding of good teaching, and my actions as my ideas were revised and enlarged.

Thus, direct experience framed as Erfahrung, is in “opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350), such as the propositional and procedural knowledge dominating understandings of good teaching in teacher education programs. Gadamer’s (2004) Erfahrung provides a resource to capture my own direct experience of plagiarism differently. However, in exploring how the experience allowed me to see and know plagiarism differently, and consequently change my choices of action, I contend with another Gadamerian resource: fusion of horizons.
Fusion of Horizons

Despite being grounded in our historical situation influenced by *prejudices* and *traditions*, our understanding is “something into which we move and that moves with us… the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 303). Just as I moved into the particular experience of plagiarism and found my general understandings to be interrupted, it was in being open and presenting my view “thereby placing it at risk, and opening [myself] to what the other says” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 47) that made new understanding or a fusion of horizons possible.

As a resource in my study, *fusion of horizons* frames understanding as essentially historically affected, limited, and finite, but as “essentially open” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143). It is this openness to the other that informs my perspective that an international field placement taking place outside of the traditions of schooling as found within a BC context of teacher education can surface different understandings of good teaching for pre-service teachers.

In sum, what I am seeking to achieve in my study is a *fusion of horizons* “whereby our own horizon [mine and those of the study participants] is enlarged and enriched” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143). However, this fusion does not mean that “one side surrenders understanding to the other, nor that the fusion involves complete sublimation of both” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 49). I am not seeking answers, overall agreement between participants, or for one horizon to dominate the other; agreeing to disagree is “acceptable”. Rather, it is the possibility where individuals take into account other perspectives, which may contribute to the possible *fusion of horizons* and be “transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 371). As such, Gadamer’s *fusion of horizons* is a perspective from which I will explore any new understandings of good teaching to emerge.
In considering Gadamer’s (2004) hermeneutic philosophy, my study will aim to create opportunities for genuine conversation with my participants, with concerns for historical conditioning, tradition, prejudices, dialogue, the hermeneutic circle, Erlebnis and Erfahrung, in order to explore whether a fusion of horizons in conversations about the experience of teaching is possible. As Gadamer (2004) reminds us, the act of understanding is not a linear process that can be achieved via the application of objective tools and explicit processes articulated in an objective “step-by-step” guide. Rather, understanding is a complex, ongoing, often conflicting process. Such a perspective challenges conditions of understanding as often institutionalized in a teacher education program, which posits a theory-into-practice perspective and focuses on the acquisition and application of propositional and procedural knowledge. I seek not definitive answers, but better understandings of good teaching.

**Limitations of Conceptual Framework**

While I am convinced that Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics offers resources to interpret the understandings of good teaching for pre-service teachers participating in a direct experience of international field placement, there are criticisms and limitations that need to be acknowledged. In relation to my study, the main concerns involve relativism and the neglect of power relations.

The charge of relativism stems from critiquing Gadamer’s central notion of fusion of horizons, which fails to provide a central concept of validation, thereby making no one interpretation more plausible than any other “because the hermeneutic view of truth does not answer [to] foundationalist expectations” (Grondin, 1994, p. 141). Gadamer’s hermeneutics claims that there are no objective or absolute truths, thereby rendering the validity of understanding subjective, this is, according to perceptions, considerations, etc. Critics claim that
Gadamer’s hermeneutics “is thought to lose its ability to claim objective status” (Barthold, 2012, “E.D. Hirsh,” para. 40). Knowledge and objectivity are thus deemed impossible, and as Thurgood-Sagal (2007) outlines, “there are no differences between positions that illuminate meaning or those that distort meaning. . . if all meaning is historically situated, then all positions are valid” (pp. 48-49). In other words, every utterance or meaning brought into being is a truth relative to any subjective value according to the differences and considerations of the individual.

In response, Gadamer (2004) contends that attaining final truth is futile and “understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding” (p. 306). But understanding is also application in that we apply our understanding to that which is to be interpreted (i.e., understandings of good teaching when teaching in the field placement). In this sense, understanding, interpretation, and application is “one unified process . . . [where] we consider application to be just as integral a part to the hermeneutic process” (p. 307). This challenges the theory-into-practice perspective, as understanding good teaching involves applying the understandings to the pre-service teachers’ (the interpreters’) present situation as encountered in the classroom. Thus, the truth of understanding posited by the theory in its claim of objectivity is unachievable as the interpreter is an active and creative force in shaping all interpretation (Barthold, 2012). As Gadamer (2004) summarizes, there is “no understanding that is free of all prejudices. . . . [as] the knower’s own being comes into play” (p. 484).

In terms of my hermeneutic research, it should resist unequivocal conclusions as each interpretation and articulation of understanding will be specific to the particular context and situation of the participants engaged in the study. My challenge is to explore and highlight the conditions of understanding each participant brings to meaning making, or interpretation, when
articulating understandings of the practice of teaching. In being open to these particulars and conditions of understanding, my study brings a different “power” to traditional scientific, quantitative or evidence-based research. It brings with it the power of the “particular – in the recognition of one voice, one [direct] experience, one mattering of human life . . . that practice professions [such as teaching] have always found [to be] their ‘real’ power” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 180). This is something that teacher education, in its bid to pursue “evidence-based” best practices, too often marginalizes. Thus, in recognizing the particular voices and experiences of my study participants, my research differs by focusing on the human condition of understanding good teaching in teacher education and in teaching in the field.

The concern that Gadamer neglects power relations relates to philosophical hermeneutics lacking “an explicit critical function” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 43) which stems from Habermas’s critique of the universalistic claims of Gadamer’s hermeneutics in which Habermas emphasizes “there are structural societal barriers that systematically distort such dialogue and communication . . . it is not sufficient simply to concentrate on the universality of the linguistic medium” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 190). Gadamer’s emphasis on “tradition, prejudice, and the universal nature of hermeneutics blinded him to ideological operations of power” (Barthold, 2012, “b. Jürgen Habermas,” para. 41) which Thurgood-Sagal (2007) notes “can be used to legitimate indoctrination and ignores the political and economic forces of society that influence our thought and communication” (p. 50) and may leave “one without the ability to reflect critically upon the sources of ideology at play in the theoretical and material levels of society” (Barthold, 2012, “b. Jürgen Habermas,” para. 41). I only need to think of school children whose sense of learning and ability are interpreted via grades received on tests and assignments. Schooling, testing and assignments are traditions so embedded within understandings of learning
and ability, it is difficult for pre-service teachers to reflect critically about them, let alone openly examine the forces and power embedded within such structure. As Schott (1991) (quoted in Kinsella, 2006) notes, the issue of power in tradition (such as that which assessment has over vulnerable students and pre-service teachers) can make genuine conversation impossible, since it does not recognize that “groups whose discourses, histories, and traditions have been marginalized need to struggle for the self-affirmation that is both a condition and consequence of naming oneself as an interpreter” (p. 209) in the dialogue.

Gadamer’s (2004) response to the charge of neglecting power relations charge is to argue that power itself is tied to tradition. For example, critical theory itself is a form of tradition, as “critical theory is itself only parochially grounded and . . . simply reflects the political prejudices of a particular group” (Warnke, 1987, p. 129). In responding to the lack of critique of tradition, Warnke (1987) further explains Gadamer’s point that the “rationality of tradition cannot be measured against an ideal of either absolute knowledge, complete enlightenment or constraint-free consensus” (p. 130). Rather, it is within the practical context, the level of previous understanding and current openness that we are capable of evaluating a tradition and that ultimately “stresses the finitude and fallibility of our knowledge” (Warnke, 1987, p. 131). Therefore, it really is not possible for us to stand outside of tradition or to achieve an ultimate critical understanding. Instead, hermeneutics “incites the particularities and intimacies of our lives to call these traditions to account, compelling them to bear witness to the lives we are living” (Jardine, p. 2 in Kinsella, 2006).

The challenge for my research is to be open to the power relations embedded in my relationships with my students – as a researcher and faculty member at the institution in which they study. In working towards a genuine conversation that might surface new understandings
and judgements of good teaching, informed by a direct experience of international field placement, I need to be open to the traditions, prejudices, and historical context influencing my interpretations and dialogue within that conversation. I need to surface some of the various traditions informing and encompassing the practice of teaching, such as directing the dialogue to include aspects that have traditionally been marginalized within teacher education, including knowledge gained through direct experience (as opposed to high status propositional and procedural knowledge). I also need to be clear with participants that my role is not focused on judging their understandings, interpretations and actions, rather it is on being open to the topic of good teaching and allowing it to guide the dialogue.
CHAPTER THREE – THE EXPLORATION PLAN

For Gadamer, “truth is reached not through abstract constructions, but through dialogue” (Grondin, 2003, p. 12). Similarly, I used this project as an example of a genuine conversation to gain understandings about good teaching and I used various Gadamerian resources, such as historical conditioning, Erfahrung, openness to other, fusion of horizons and the hermeneutic circle to facilitate the conversation. Thus it is my “conversation” with the data – the genuine conversation – that constitutes the principal research methodology for my study. My research findings, as represented by the words on the ensuing pages, represent the spirit of the conversation. In line with this conversation, it was dialogue between and amongst my study participants (in the form of interviews where I attempted to allow the conversations to flow by employing open ended questions as prompts) that became the data for this study.

The words used to represent my “conversation” (findings) contain not only the interpretations of a direct experience of international field placements at BC Offshore Schools for the study participants, but also my own interpretations, or fusion of horizons, around how such a direct experience may inform my understandings of good teaching. Framed as such, my study uses a qualitative interpretive approach focused on seeking rich understanding and interpretation rather than causal explanation and verification. Such an approach acknowledges the unique nature of understanding, recognizes the role of historicity and language in interpretation, views inquiry as conversation, and recognizes the ambiguous nature of interpretation (Kinsella, 2006).

To elaborate on the details, this chapter outlines the study design and explains the specific research procedures used to conduct it. I begin by presenting my research design, that of hermeneutic research, in the applied activity of teaching and my rationale for adopting it. Next I
describe the study participants and the selection process, as well as provide contextual details of where the study took place, including the specific settings of the host BC Offshore Schools. Following this, data collection techniques, namely qualitative interviews, and the importance of dialogue, are outlined. This is followed by a data analysis explanation which includes the rationale for analysis methods, and frameworks selected, as well as the analysis process used. Finally, I conclude the chapter by addressing how trustworthiness was established.

Rationale and Assumptions

The purpose of my study is to examine in-depth the direct experiences of six BC pre-service teachers in international field placements in order to understand how such an experience may inform understandings of good teaching. While most teacher education programs, like those in BC, have an emphasis on understanding good teaching as a technical, skills based activity, informed by propositional and procedural knowledge (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Loughran & Russell, 2007), and provide limited opportunities and encouragement for pre-service teachers to theorize about their lived experiences of teaching (Britzman, 2003), I am primarily interested in how the direct experience of an international field placement contributed to the understandings of teaching, and possibly informed new understandings of good teaching. It was, after all, my own direct experiences of teaching that allowed me to come to understand that good teaching involved more than propositional and procedural knowledge; it involved acting well and working in relationship with students, which inevitably involved making judgements of goodness within practice, and taking into account knowledge gained from direct experiences with particular individuals, such as students in the classroom. In short, good teaching “involves both epistemological and ethical concerns” (Coulter et al., 2007, p. 4).
Since understanding the applied activity of teaching and determinations of goodness within it is at the core of my research, I used a qualitative hermeneutic approach to design this study. Furthermore, situating my study within a BC Offshore School context provides significant differences in relation to how good teaching and schooling is understood from the perspective of the local host cultures, while at the same time providing sufficient familiarity for participants to engage substantively as teachers during a short-term placement, and to potentially surface taken-for-granted assumptions about good teaching that may go unchallenged in a regular BC based placement.

**Research Design**

Specifically, my design was guided by several Gadamerian resources, including *historical conditioning, tradition, and prejudices*, which informed my understandings of good teaching, to explore the development of a *horizon of understanding*, from which the participants interpreted their direct experiences. Direct experiences of teaching and how such experiences were understood as either familiar or strange during the international field placement generated the primary “data” for my study. Here, the Gadamerian resource of *hermeneutic circle* was used to explore how individual participants made meaning of direct experiences when integrating particular direct experiences as either familiar or strange into larger general contexts of teaching. In my research, this circular movement of particular direct experiences (the parts) and general understandings of teaching (the whole) aided in exploring the relationship between international field placement experiences and understandings of good teaching. In short, the process of understanding from a hermeneutic standpoint is “always from the parts to the whole and from the whole to parts, thus fulfilling the hermeneutic circle” (Liu & Sui, 2014, p. 763). Creating opportunities for dialogue was fundamental in guiding my data collection methods, which
predominantly included individual and focus group interviews that were held before, during, and after the international field placement. In addition, pre-service teacher’s e-journals of their international experience were also another important data source.

In analyzing the data, I drew upon Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) three-part constant comparison method of “unitizing, categorizing, and thematizing” (Wang & Clarke, 2014, p. 110). In this study, this successive data reduction process allowed for the constant comparison of what the participants found to be familiar or strange in relation to teaching before, during, and after their international field placement. The first step involved an initial line-by-line analysis of interview transcripts and e-journal entries to identify instances of familiarity and strangeness for each participant. Instances of familiarity and strangeness were then constantly compared with each other until distinct units of meaning relating to the practice of teaching emerged for each participant. These units of meaning were compared further until distinct and unique categories relating to understandings of the practice of teaching emerged. In total, six categories emerged, and were interpreted in terms of varying degrees of familiarity, strangeness, and sometimes both, for each participant. The categories, listed in alphabetical order, are:

1. BC Context: BC based curriculum, BC based resources, BC certified teachers, etc.
2. Classroom Characteristics: physical set-up, access to technology within, class size, resources available, etc.
3. School Setting: physical school set-up, school ownership, routines and timetables, school culture, etc.
4. Staff Relations: tensions between, friendship levels, turnover rate, etc.
5. Student Characteristics: grade level, ESL learners, multiculturalism, engagement in learning, stress levels, etc.
6. Teaching Activities: lesson planning, delivery of subject content, classroom management, assessment, etc.

For each participant, these categories were analyzed in terms of their understandings of good teaching when integrating particular direct experiences as either familiar or strange in relation to their particular horizon of understanding. This allowed me to interpret varying degrees of familiarity and strangeness specific to each participant and category, while the Gadamerian resources of Erfahrung and Erlebnis informed my perspective in analyzing how the experience either interrupted or confirmed their general understandings of teaching. In looking for evidence of new understandings, or alternate truths of good teaching for each participant, the Gadamerian resource of fusion of horizons was used in analyzing if the new information gained from the direct experience was brought to bear on existing understandings to form new understandings of good teaching. For each participant, the most pertinent categories are expanded upon in chapter four in the form of mini-cases for each participant.

The final step – a further level of comparison and abstraction – sought to identify overarching themes related to the pre-service teachers’ interruption and new understandings of good teaching across all participants as a result of their international field placement. This allowed me to theorize about the extent to which experience mattered in developing understandings of teaching, as well as in determining the goodness within it. In addition to this, it provided me with the opportunity to explore if good teaching could be understood as something other than the application of techno-rational skills embedded in a theory-into-practice paradigm. Thus, based on the purpose of my study with an emphasis on understanding good teaching as an applied activity, a hermeneutic approach informed the research design by offering
a “substantive philosophy rather than a strategic method to guide the research” (Moules et al., 2015, pp. 4-5).

**Data Sources and Sampling Procedures**

Six pre-service teachers in their penultimate term of a post-degree teacher education program participated in this study. Five originated from an elementary teacher education program, and one from a secondary teacher education program. All had completed 330 hours of teaching methodology based coursework, with 90 hours focusing specifically on the principles and practices of teaching, and 45 days of BC based field placement prior to participating in the study. Participation in this study was based on the pre-service teachers’ involvement in the International Practicum Placement (IPP) program. Participation was voluntary.

Participant selection for the IPP program was based upon a general application process in the Faculty of Education, and then further developed by me as I assumed the responsibilities of pre-service teacher recruitment, host school selection, and pre-service teacher placement. Selection into the IPP program was based on pre-service teachers completing an application profile whereby preferences of host school location, grades to be taught, and potential travel partners were listed; also, reasons for participation and self-evaluation of attributes that supported participation in the IPP program were required. Applicants were evaluated for participation suitability by a current faculty instructor and their current field placement supervisor. Aspects evaluated included teaching-related dimensions, such as classroom initiative, communication skills, demonstrated professionalism, reliability, and common sense in the face of day-to-day teaching challenges, as well as personal attributes such as flexibility and self-appraisal. Aspects were scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with one correlating with a rating of
“poor” and four with a rating of “excellent.” Applicants were given a total score out of 32, and only those receiving a percentage score of 24 or above were considered for placement.

The application stated that participation is restricted due to the limited number of host schools, and that acceptance into the IPP program is a privilege. In addition to this, applicants were advised that only those who were in good academic standing (receiving no grades lower than B+), had completed all teacher education program prerequisite coursework, and had successful previous BC based field placements, would be considered. The Faculty rationale for including these expectations relates to the nature and set-up of the international field placement; for example, participants are expected to travel to, and teach in, host schools with no university faculty supervision or direct support. Placed in groups of two or three and teaching independently, participants also had limited direct cohort member support from their teacher education program. Independence, flexibility, and resiliency in both teaching and personal demeanor were seen to be of great importance in having a successful international field placement. Furthermore, applicants were advised that the Faculty of Education views international field placement as a value-added “additional practicum placement in their respective programs” (VIU, 2015a). Host school placement in the IPP program was based on a “best fit” match between available sponsor teachers, teaching focus of the pre-service teacher, and particular details as per the local context in which the school was situated (i.e., cultural rules around gender, etc.). Finally, the BC based field placement prior to participation in the IPP program required participants to demonstrate extensive planning and preparation in the completion of a “framework binder.” This placement consisted of a three-week teaching block consisting of an 80% teaching load as part of the overall BC field placement component.
In terms of study participation, participants were accepted into the IPP program prior to being asked to take part in my study. Upon receiving ethics approval from the institution in which this study is based, and from the institution where my doctoral program is situated, I formally asked each IPP participant if they would like to participate in my study (see Appendix A). My rationale for this procedure was that I did not want IPP participants to feel obligated to partake in the study; IPP program participation did not equate to study participation. Additionally, I was an instructor in the teacher education program from which the IPP program participants were recruited, recruitment for this study did not occur until a final grade had been submitted for the course I taught. In the end, all participants in the IPP program agreed to participate in my study, and signed a letter of consent (see Appendix B).

It should be noted that in some ways the six study participants represented the general group from which they were selected, that of pre-service teachers engaged in a post-degree teacher education program. However, study participants also differed from the general group. Firstly, they self-selected to participate in both the IPP and the study. Secondly, they were evaluated and deemed to be strong and successful pre-service teachers due to the IPP program application process. One might speculate that this may result in individuals who are more able to reflect and articulate understandings of good teaching, as they have confidence and success in previous teaching and learning-to-teach contexts; however, I have no research to support or refute this claim. Additionally, from a hermeneutic perspective, this point becomes largely irrelevant as my aim is to explore understandings, interpretations, and actions relating to good teaching; to engage in a dialogue that focused on this topic, and not the ability to articulate understanding. I already assume that each individual brings their own understandings based on their history. I do not interpret these aspects as subjective “intrusions” to be bracketed out from
my study; rather, they are precisely the individual details that make up the particular beings in my study.

Study Contexts

The International Practicum Placement Program

International field placements at BC Offshore Schools within my institution began in 2010 when the Dean approved a request by two pre-service teachers to complete their second of three field placements at a BC Offshore School in China. This placement took place prior to my arrival at the institution, but was part of my job interview, and something that attracted me to my current position. Upon being employed I had mistakenly assumed that a structured IPP program and application process was in place to support pre-service teachers hoping to engage in an international field placement. It came as a surprise to me that there were no pre-service teachers heading overseas as no other faculty had championed the precedent set by the previous two pre-service teachers. Consequently, I volunteered to take on the role as the primary contact, promotor, pre-service teacher recruiter, and chief organizer. As the faculty member on staff with the “most” direct international teaching experience, it seemed like a good fit for me, and I was eager to provide international teaching opportunities. International teaching was, after all, a time in my career that gave me great joy as a teacher. I established the IPP program with an inaugural group of six pre-service teachers who travelled to various Asian based BC Offshore Schools in the spring of 2012. Since that time, I have created and streamlined various IPP program procedures and policies, established close relationships with our host schools, and actually visited my first BC Offshore School in central China in November 2014.

Institutional policy informing my practice around international field placement sits predominantly outside of my faculty, resting with the Faculty of International Education. Much
of my initial organizational and procedural developmental efforts were made without direct input from the Faculty of International Education, or overt consideration of institutional policies. I worked (and continue to work) on developing the program “off the side of my desk” with no official role attached to my current professional position, which includes no official responsibility for field placement. However, as I established closer relationships with key staff in the Faculty of International Education, and a deeper understanding of the policies guiding “field school placement,” I have increasingly included this Faculty in supporting the pre-service teachers heading to BC Offshore Schools. Steadily, I find myself carving out a professional role that includes elements of international field placement and “study abroad” for pre-service teachers. All of these direct experiences are fused with observations and engagements that I had as an instructor of teacher education, as well as my additional administrative and student support role of degree advisor.

Within the Faculty of Education specifically, international field placements is highlighted as “International Practica” under the umbrella of “Field Placement Partners” (VIU, 2015a), which briefly outlines the application procedures, expectations of pre-service teacher participants during the international placement, placement evaluation details, and potential placement locations. International field placement is framed as “An opportunity to participate in an additional practicum placement” (VIU, 2015a) as opposed to replacing the existing BC based field placements, as was the case with the inaugural 2010 and subsequent 2012 placements. Additionally, current teacher education promotional material includes international field placement (VIU, 2012) as “International Teaching Opportunities” which frames the Faculty of Education as offering “a variety of international teaching practica. . . in a field school setting . . . at various BC Certified Offshore Schools”.
Finally, at the institutional level, international field placement is conceptualized as part of the internationalization process, which is described on the institution’s website as “a process that integrates an international element into the teaching, learning, research and service functions of an educational institution” (VIU, 2008). In its commitment, since the early 1980s, “to creating international understanding through education” (VIU, 2008) the international field placement is framed as an “out-of-country experience for Canadian students that positions them to be more competitive in seeking employment” (VIU, 2008). As it is currently conceived by the university, the international field placement is not framed as an opportunity to surface understandings of good teaching and the judgements made about those understandings.

Specific to this study, the international field placement consisted of a four-week placement during the second of a three term teacher education program. Participants were required to teach a half-time, or 50% load, and to participate in the “daily life” of their host school, which included participating in extracurricular and wider community events taking place during the placement. Just prior to departing, participants completed the final three weeks of their BC based field placement which had been ongoing since the beginning of their teacher education program. It was this BC based placement that formed the basis for official evaluation for the teacher education program, completed by Faculty of Education Field Supervisors. “Evaluation” for the international placement is outlined on the faculty’s webpage as “slightly less formal but will still involve supervision from school principals and sponsor teachers [and] at the host schools’ discretion, students [are] provided with a reference [letter] about their overseas teaching experience and performance” (VIU, 2015a). Such an evaluation structure is consistent with field placement evaluation at another large BC based teacher education institution (K. McPherson, personal communication, July 7, 2015). Finally, participants could opt to teach at a
different grade level or subject area as assigned for the BC based placement, providing that the necessary qualifications, as set by the BC Teacher Regulation Branch, had been met. In this study, three participants opted to make a switch in grade level, with one opting to switch from Elementary to Secondary, while three participants opted to teach at the same grade level as their BC based placements.

**The BC Offshore Schools**

Host BC Offshore Schools for this study are situated within the BC Global Education Program (BCME, 2014) which is housed within the BC Ministry of Education. The primary purpose for the program is to “encourage the development of international relationships and create opportunities for global learning experiences that will benefit BC students, teachers, schools and communities” (BCME, 2014, p. 1). As part of the program, the BC Ministry of Education “regulates the delivery of the BC K-12 education program (the BC curriculum) to students studying in K-12 schools overseas [with] currently 41 certified schools operating in six different countries delivering the BC curriculum to more than 10,300 K-12 students” (BCME, 2014, p. 1). The governing boards of individual BC Offshore Schools must ensure that the delivery of the BC curriculum meets all the requirements as set by Sections 1-6 of the Educational Standards for the province of BC, and that the “educational program is operating in a manner that is consistent with the intellectual, human and social development, and career goals identified in Part C of the Statement of Education Policy Order for BC” (BCME, 2014, p. 24) which outlines the goals of education, the duties, rights and responsibilities of such key stakeholders in BC education, including parents, students, school administrators, school boards, district officials, and teacher professional certification (British Columbia Ministry of Education Governance and Legislation Branch [BCMEGLB], 1989). In short, a BC Offshore School could
be interpreted as a familiar schooling context for international field placement participants as the school is founded and informed by the same policies and procedures that govern the practices of both public and independent schools in BC. Each BC Offshore host school can be generalized as such, but details particular to each school (described below) provide further context for the reader and describe the setting in which the participants in this study engaged in an international field placement.

Three BC Offshore Schools were used to host participants in this study. One school was located in a large urban centre in Thailand, catering to a mix of Thai national and foreign expatriate students. Based on the school’s website (British Columbia International School Bangkok, n.d.), the institution opened in September 2007, is certified by the BC Ministry of Education at grades 10 to 12, and accredited by the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Thailand for Prep (pre-Kindergarten) to grade 12. The school follows the same academic school year as BC, and the BC curriculum with grades 10 to 12 students are required to meet graduation requirements as set by the BC Ministry of Education. Students also write the BC provincial examinations in grades 10 to 12. Finally, the school is dedicated to preparing students to become leaders within Thailand, and internationally, with an ability to function within both Eastern and Western traditions. This school hosted three study participants in various elementary and secondary grades.

Two BC Offshore Schools in Northeast China hosted the other three participants, with two participants at an elementary school, and one at a secondary school. According to the elementary host school’s website (Maple Leaf Educational Systems, n.d.), it caters to foreign national students, or non-Chinese passport holders, living in the surrounding urban area. It offers the BC curriculum, taught in English by certified teachers, and highlights a multinational student
body representing more than thirty countries. The school states that the students are broad-minded and eager to embrace cultures and change, and they are unified by the English language as a vehicle for communication and understanding, which is claimed to make for enthusiastic, confident, students ready to learn and expand their academic horizons. This school hosted two elementary based study participants.

Finally, the third host school was a secondary school (grades 10 to 12) catering to Chinese national students. Situated on a large campus in the same urban area as the foreign national elementary school above, the school’s website (Maple Leaf Educational Systems, n.d.) states it offers a dual BC and China diploma program with over 2800 students on segregated boys’ and girls’ campuses employing over a hundred BC certified teachers. According to the 2014 statistics posted on the website, graduates of the school gained entry to various post-secondary institutions around the world, but predominantly in the USA and Canada. This school hosted one secondary based study participant.

**Importance of Dialogue in Gathering Data**

Interviews were the main method used to gather data on the topic of good teaching as understood by pre-service teachers participating in a direct experience of international field placement. The intention of these interviews was not for participants to retell a story recounting the event of international field placement as an *Erlebnis* experience, rather the purpose was to explore “what in their stories and [direct] experiences [had] something to say” (Moules et al., 2011, p. 89) about the topic of good teaching. However, as “language is a medium where I and world meet” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 469) and it is in dialogue with others “that understanding takes place” (Freeman, 2011, p. 547), it was in the conversation between myself and study participants, as well as between the participants themselves, that understandings of good teaching in an
international field placement were brought into being. Consequently, the purpose of the interviews was to “allow the topic to speak again, in a new way, in regard to present-day issues and traditions” (Freeman, 2011, p. 547).

However, I do acknowledge that the dialogue which unfolded was for the purpose of this study and my research. As such, it was I that set the agenda, the questions posed, and arranged for the interview settings, thereby potentially wielding considerable power over the participants. Nonetheless, it was the notion of exploring participants’ direct experiences in an international setting in relation to their understandings of good teaching that framed the overall conversation. What occurred within each interview unfolded as naturally as possible, thereby allowing the agenda to be shared and negotiated in relationship with the participants as the topic took the lead in the genuine conversation. To facilitate this, my interviews, as described by Moules et al. (2015), took on certain characteristics, including intense listening, a balance between participant led dialogue and my research focus, a deliberate attempt on my part to avoid counselling the students, a recognition of critical junctures, the following of leads as it related to the topic, and curiosity as a means to remain engaged.

**Data Collection Techniques and Procedures**

In general, data collection took place in three stages; pre-international field placement, during the international field placement, and post-international field placement. Specifically, one individual interview and one focus group interview with all participants was conducted prior to the placement. Two individual interviews with each participant were conducted remotely during the placement, and were supported by individual e-journal entries completed once a week throughout the four week placement. Upon return, one individual interview and one focus group interview with all participants was held.
Pre-Placement Interviews

These initial conversations were central in creating an opportunity for study participants and myself to develop shared meanings around understandings of good teaching. The purpose of the pre-placement interview was to access the various Gadamerian resources, such as *historical conditions, traditions, and prejudices*, in order to provide an “initial orientation to that [good teaching and action] which [I am] trying to understand” (Warnke, 2002, p. 315). Such an orientation articulates a *horizon of understanding*, or the “range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301). Thus, in order to grasp this initial orientation of good teaching and action for each study participant, I inquired about the historical contexts of schooling, learning and teacher education by posing questions (see Appendix C) relating to previous schooling contexts, memorable direct experiences of learning and teachers, direct teaching experiences in the teacher education program, etc., with questions such as: What inspired you to become a teacher? What does it mean to be a teacher? Describe your ideal classroom and teacher, etc. Follow-up questions, in relation to responses provided by participants, were used to probe deeper into the particulars, such as: Why did you feel this way? What made that particular example stand out more than others? These probes were incorporated during the interview in the hopes of developing as broad of a *horizon of understanding* and as rich of a historical context as possible for each participant.

Additionally, to grasp the *traditions* through which the international placement would be mediated by participants, I also inquired about predictions of familiarity within the international placement setting relating to schooling and the practice of teaching. I was interested to find out what normalizing forces each participant would draw upon when making meaning/interpreting direct experiences they had during the international placement. According to Gadamer (2004),
prejudices inform our judgements and actions, thus it is important for me to establish context of prejudices if I hope to understand how an international field placement may shift understandings of good teaching and action. Consequently, for this reason, I needed to hold individual interviews to establish such horizons of understanding prior to the international placement. Furthermore, it was from these horizons of understanding that a point of departure for dialogue during the international placement was established, that is, a point that framed pre-service teachers’ understandings in terms of “what lies behind (that is, tradition, history), around (that is, present culture and society), and before (that is, expectations directed at the future) one” (Barthold, 2012, “b. Prejudice, Tradition, Authority, Horizon,” para. 31) prior to participating in an international field placement.

Individual interviews took place at my institution, lasted approximately one hour, and were recorded. The interview method used was situated within van Manen’s (1990) conversational interview framework, focusing on personal stories, anecdotes, recollections, or metaphors of lived/direct experiences that would allow me to interpret a horizon of understanding of the practice of teaching and judgements of good within it. In anticipation of making meaning of future direct experiences from the international field placement, this “fore-understanding” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 294) of good teaching resulted from both the study participants and myself “being concerned with the same subject... [and] determin[ing] what can be realized as unified meaning” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 294) in the future.

Finally, as hermeneutic work “is based on the polarity of familiarity and strangeness” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 295), I inquired, within the initial interview, about familiarity and strangeness participants expected/predicted to be directly experienced during the international
field placement. In doing so, I attempted to build the context in which to frame the in-between place where new understandings of good teaching and action could be articulated.

In the spirit of a conversational interview (van Manen, 1990), an additional forty-five minute focus group interview was held with all participants at my institution. The purpose was to provide a public forum in which to engage in dialogue around understandings of good teaching, as well as predictions of familiarity and strangeness to be directly experienced. The goal was to see what kinds of new or different understanding might be generated in a group context: how will understandings expressed during individual interviews be confirmed and/or how will new or different understandings emerge? The focus group interview represented an opportunity for all study participants and myself to engage in a focused dialogue where a “commonality is constantly being formed in our relation to tradition [that of good teaching]” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 293). A second element of the focus group interview was to elicit direct articulations of good teaching and action. As a prompt for dialogue, participants were asked to analyze metaphors for teaching (adapted from Apps, 1991, pp. 23-24) and determine, individually and as a group, which metaphor best represented their current understandings of good teaching and action (see Appendix D for metaphor activity and questions posed). The purpose of the collective engagement was to allow for a potentially richer dialogue by the participants that extended what was previously achieved in the individual interview context. Similar to the individual interview, this would allow me to further interpret a horizon of understanding of good teaching and action for each study participant. This elicitation was also important for orientating how future direct experiences of teaching would inform, and possibly shift, understandings of good teaching, and action for each study participant.
Finally, the notion of Gadamer’s *hermeneutic circle* underpins the entire pre-departure data collection method. It articulates how understandings are formed, namely “as the interplay of the movement of tradition [general understandings of good teaching] and the movement of the interpreter [direct experiences/particular understandings of study participants]” (2004, p. 293). Thus, the pre-departure data collection phase represented the articulation of the fore-understanding upon which future meaning and understanding would emerge.

**During-Placement Interviews and E-Journal Entries**

Data collected during the international field placement utilized a two-pronged approach through a set of pre-service teacher e-journal entries and digitally recorded remote individual interviews. For the e-journal entries, participants were asked to write one entry (approximately 300 words) at the end of each week for a total of four entries throughout the duration of the international field placement. For participant convenience, entries were written and submitted in the form of an email. In line with my hermeneutic study, and with the focus of seeking new understanding of good teaching as directly experienced in an international placement, the in-between space between familiarity and strangeness was the grounding for both the e-journal and the remote interviews. Participants were asked to reflect on aspects of their placement that struck them as familiar and unfamiliar within e-journal entries. Prompts for e-journal entries included: Within the context of my school, something I noticed as unfamiliar/familiar is . . . Elements of unfamiliarity/familiarity include . . . (see Appendix E for full list of prompts). The purpose of the e-journal entry was to record participants’ interpretations of teaching, educational interactions, or observations that resonated as familiar or strange. By expanding upon why participants noticed particular events, interactions, etc. as either familiar or strange, the aim was to highlight links between previous pre-placement direct experiences and those of the
international placement. I also hoped to explore how such interpretations of familiarity and/or strangeness may generate new or different understandings of good teaching.

Additionally, participants engaged in two remote individual interviews during the four week international placement. Two fifteen minute Skype individual interviews took place every two weeks. Situated within the same hermeneutic approach outlined for the e-journal entries, the remote interviews were an opportunity for participants to continue exploring, and to expand on elements of familiarity and strangeness as directly experienced within the international placement. I continued within van Manen’s (1990) *conversational interview* framework where I focused on particular personal stories, anecdotes, recollections, or metaphors of lived/direct experience that spoke to challenges or interruptions to understandings of good teaching as it connected to familiarity and strangeness within the BC Offshore School context. To facilitate the conversation, a number of prompts were used, such as: What did you find to be different and in what ways? Can you tell me about anything you noticed as challenging? In relation to responses provided by participants, follow-up questions were used, such as: Can you tell me about anything you are doing differently in your teaching since you arrived? And in what ways are you doing things differently? (see Appendix F for a list of questions).

Since it is in dialogue with others “that understanding takes place” (Freeman, 2011, p. 547), I tried to allow “the topic [good teaching] to speak again, in a new way, in regard to present-day issues and traditions” (Freeman, 2011, p. 547). To build on Gadamer’s (2004) framing of direct experience as an interruption of what has been previously known or understood, *Erfahrung*, my exploration drew upon Brindley et al.’s (2009) framework of “consonance and dissonance” (p. 527). This work was based on Cochran-Smith’s (2004) research that outlines teacher education as often located within what is familiar (consonant) in
contrast to what is unfamiliar (or dissonant). Brindley et al. (2009) explicated that these concepts are conceptually related, and are particularly relevant to international contexts, as they relay “notions of pre-service teacher expectations for fieldwork, and how these expectations are either confirmed or unfulfilled” (p. 527), which they argue aid in understanding how pre-service teachers make sense of their placement. Within my study, this approach was used to explore ways in which international field placements either confirmed or challenged/interrupted understandings of good teaching and judgements of good actions. Using Gadamer’s (2004) Erfahrung, it allowed me to interpret direct experiences where a participant was “pulled up short” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322) when an encounter or interaction did not conform with prior expectations of familiarity or “trustworthy generalisations” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322). It was the dialogue of the remote interview that enabled study participants and myself to explore the different knowledge encountered in the direct experience.

**Post-Placement Interviews**

Similar to the pre-departure data collection process, post-placement data collection consisted of one individual interview and one focus group interview. Individual interviews took place at times and locations convenient for each participant, and generally within two weeks of returning to BC. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, were digitally recorded, and once again followed van Manen’s (1990) conversational interview framework. The purpose of the interview was to provide a private opportunity for dialogue around international field placement experiences that represented points of familiarity and strangeness, and how participants made meaning, in relation to good teaching and action, of the new knowledge gained. Questions used to probe such perspectives included: What did you encounter as being the most strange? Why and how? What did you encounter as being the most familiar? Why and how? Would you judge
the elements of familiarity and/or strangeness as representing “good” within the practice of teaching and why? (See Appendix G for full list of questions). This third phase of data collection occurred once all participants had returned from their international placements.

Data was interpreted from a Gadamerian perspective, looking for themes representing shifts in *horizon of understanding* and an *openness* to another, as well as potential interruptions in understandings and judgements of “good.” Additionally, data gathered from the final group conversation was interpreted using a Gadamerian lens looking for themes around direct experiences that were framed as interruption (*Erfahrung*), and how a group conversation/dialogue within a larger public context involving multiple voices prompted new or different understandings of good teaching and action.

Finally, if the dialogue indicated/spoke of an interruption to understanding, did it constitute new insights, a *fusion of horizons*, and leave “ideas [of good teaching and action] revised and enlarged” (Higgins, 2010, p. 323)? In order to focus the dialogue in such a direction, the following questions were asked in relation to direct experiences in the international field placement: How did you act in response? Did you act differently than you would have in BC? Would you judge these differences to be good? The aim was also to generate an understandings of *traditions* and *prejudices* that informed current (i.e., post-international field placement) *horizons of understanding* of the practice of teaching and judgements of “good.”

Secondly, a forty-five minute focus group interview completed the data collection. Within the spirit of a *conversational interview* (van Manen, 1990), the purpose of the final focus group interview was to provide a public forum in which participants could engage in dialogue around understandings of good teaching and action directly experienced during the international placement. Each participant shared examples of the most familiar and the strangest elements of
their direct teaching experiences. Participants were given approximately five minutes to explain each element of familiarity and strangeness, after which the remaining participants had approximately ten minutes to respond, or engage in focused dialogue around the elements presented. As a prompt for dialogue, questions included: Are there any commonalities or anomalies between the artifacts? How do the artifacts relate to your own direct experiences of teaching on an international field placement? In the shared focus of trying to understand good teaching as directly experienced in an international field placement at a BC Offshore School, my goal was to see if a larger conversation would surface new, or different, understandings of good teaching and action. I wanted to determine if understandings expressed during individual interviews would be confirmed and what new, or different, understandings might have emerged (see Appendix H for full list of questions).

Finally, participants were asked to recall the metaphors for teaching activity adapted from (Apps, 1991, pp. 2-24), conducted during the pre-international field placement focus group interview. The goal was to explore whether interpretations of the teaching metaphors and judgements of “good” highlighted by the metaphors had changed. Questions during this segment included: How does the metaphor selected differ from the metaphor selected prior to the international field placement? If you chose a different metaphor, why? If you chose the same metaphor, why? (see Appendix I for full list of questions). This final stage of data collection took place when participants had returned to campus for their final term in the teacher education program.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Overall, the data analysis process drew upon Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) constant comparative method, as adopted by Wang and Clarke’s (2014) study on practicum encounters of
pre-service teachers. Specifically, a three-part process described earlier of “unitizing, categorizing, and thematizing” (p. 110), was used. This successive data reduction process allowed for the constant comparison of what the participants found to be familiar or strange before, during and after the international field placement.

**Step One – Initial Reading of Transcripts**

After all twenty-six digitally recorded interviews were transcribed, I did an initial read through of all transcriptions to get a general sense of how the direct experience of teaching at a BC Offshore school was interpreted by the study participants. I noted particular experiences that caught my attention; namely those that resonated with my own direct experiences of teaching internationally, or those that made me ponder connections with my current practice in teacher education. For example, Anne’s experience of cheating and plagiarism resonated with my own experience of plagiarism, as outlined in chapter two. Here the hermeneutic circle also informed my own meaning making process as I was making sense from particular parts (parts which related to my own historical context) of the whole (international field placement experiences).

**Step Two – Organizing and Categorizing of Responses**

Using the qualitative software program NVivo Pro (2008), I grouped responses to interview questions into three separate program files; pre-, during-, and post-placement. Responses to pre-placement individual interview questions relating to “general teaching questions” and “warm up/get to know you questions” (see part A and B in Appendix C) were the first to be analyzed. In using Gadamerian resources to interpret this data (i.e., my dialogue with the transcripts), the initial phase of data analysis involved a careful reading and multiple re-readings of pre-placement interview transcripts for details pertaining the historical conditions for each participant to discern the historical contexts, traditions, and prejudices that inform
understandings interpretations of good teaching (i.e., what do participants believe and doubt about good teaching?). As a second phase of this analysis, and in a deliberate attempt to reveal prejudices informing judgements of goodness in teaching (i.e., what do participants believe and doubt about goodness?), the pre-departure focus group transcript relating to the good teaching metaphor activity (see Appendix D) and the individual interview transcripts were analyzed for units of meaning around what was believed to be good teaching for each participant prior to participating in an international field placement. These details formed the basis of the participant “Historical Context” section within each case study presented in chapter four.

I then created nodes for “familiarity” and “strangeness” in the pre-, during-, and post-placement NVivo Pro (2008) software files. I completed a line-by-line analysis of each pre-, during-, and post-placement interview transcript, and pre- and post-focus group transcript, of all questions relating to familiarity and strangeness. I identified and grouped instances of familiarity and strangeness accordingly in NVivo Pro (2008). I then further compared and contrasted the distinct grouping of familiarity and then again the distinct grouping of strangeness to look for units of meaning relating to the practice of teaching. Within each grouping units of meaning began to emerge with a total of eight units emerging in familiar and twelve in strange. The particular familiar units of meaning were then further compared with the particular strange units of meaning and vice versa. Here some units of meaning were removed as I interpreted their relationship to the practice of teaching to be less and less clear (i.e., daily life outside of school) while other units of meaning began to collapse (i.e., notions of safety and access to technology collapsing into the category of Classroom Characteristics). Finally, six distinct categories relating to the practice of teaching emerged: BC Context, Classroom Characteristics, School
Setting, Staff Relations, Student Characteristics, and Teaching Activities (as presented above) and were interpreted along varying degrees of familiarity, strangeness or both.

**Step Three – Review of Transcripts and Case Study Development**

In using the six distinct categories from Step Two, I returned to original transcripts of each participant to compare how each category had shifted from pre-placement prediction of familiarity and strangeness, to experiences of familiarity and strangeness during the placement, through to reflections of familiarity and strangeness upon completion of the placement. To keep things simple, categories were organized alphabetically for each participant, and were analyzed in terms of the frequency with which a participant referenced particular units of meaning relating to the six categories. Categories were then colour coded based on the frequency of inclusion with the conversations had with participants.

Based upon these categories, I again returned to the original transcriptions and e-journal entries compiled during and after the international field placement to look for direct experiences of interruption (*Erfahrung*) or confirmation (*Erlebnis*) to general understandings of good teaching when integrating particular direct experiences of either familiar or strange to the participants’ particular *horizon of understanding*. In looking for new understandings and insights related to good teaching for each participant (i.e., *fusion of horizons*), I further analyzed interruptions to understandings of teaching, particularly during post-placement transcripts, for each participant. For each participant, this data is presented as an individual mini-case (Stake, 2005) in chapter four, with appendices K through P presenting summaries of references made to familiar and strange for each participant.
**Step Four – Genuine Conversation with the Data.**

As a further level of comparison and abstraction, this final step of analysis sought to identify overarching themes of interruption and new understandings of good teaching across all participants. Gadamer’s resources of *Erfahrung* and *fusion of horizons* were key to this last step of analysis. During this analysis step, *Erfahrung*, or interrupting experiences that disrupted general understandings of teaching were noted. The concept of *fusion of horizons* allowed me to theorize about the extent to which experience matters in developing, changing, or extending understandings of the practice to teach and determinations of goodness within it, and to explore if good teaching could be understood as something other than an application of techno-rational skills in a *theory-into-practice* paradigm. My goal was to explore the “truth that is revealed in the process of experience and that emerges in the dialogical encounter with tradition” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 152).

In comparing and contrasting interruptions from all participants, I looked for opportunities when understandings of good teaching were challenged, or when prejudices were put at risk, as well as for an openness to alternate perspectives on good teaching. I looked for themes that pointed to such interruptions, and three broad themes emerged: the embeddedness of BC and Western values; applications of “good” pedagogy; and the pre-service teacher position within the field placement. Based on these three themes, I then theorized about the possible impacts of these interruptions by making connections with additional literature. The understandings that emerged from my *genuine conversation* with this data spoke to a problematization of practice and an increased awareness of the assumptions informing understandings of good teaching. These are presented as the first half of chapter five.
Although this analysis phase is listed as the final step, it was a process which informed, and was used, throughout my study. For example, in the initial development of each mini-case I kept a record of my *genuine conversation* with the data for each participant. I colour coded my conversations in relation to key areas of focus. Where I felt it was apparent that a Gadamerian resource was key in forming my own interpretation, I noted these reflections in, for example, green pen. For example, Molly’s extensive connections with her previous BC based field placements in determining familiarity and strangeness during the international placement (*prejudice*), or Cathy’s sense of frustration and negativity when contending with the interrupting (*Erfahrung*) experience of teaching PE in a room with numerous safety hazards. In noting initial questions and musing about what I was experiencing by directly engaging with the data, I noted questions and reflections in another colour, for example, red. When I was able to make connections to additional literature in a bid to develop my own understanding of the data, I made notes in blue. These colour coded comments were then analyzed in relation to my own understandings of good teaching, and in relation to international placements in teacher education. This raised the question, “how might such a direct experience inform understandings of good teaching?” My thoughts and conclusions, my *fusion of horizons*, are presented as implications of practice in the latter half of chapter five.

**Limitations of the Study**

Potential limitations relating to my study relate the influence of research processes and the researcher’s horizon of understanding. A brief explanation of each follows.

Firstly, I used Gadamer and his notion of philosophical hermeneutics to theorize about how preservice teachers come to understand good teaching in an in international field placement but I used more conventional qualitative research resources, such as the interview, in my data
collection methods. I concur with Thurgood-Sagal (2007) that speaking with my study participants about their experiences of teaching and understandings of good teaching may have influenced how my participants interpreted their experiences. Furthermore, it also became apparent to me during the analysis of interview transcripts that there were missed opportunities for deeper and open genuine conversations resulting from my status as a novice researcher. There were times, such as in connecting with Anne’s account of plagiarism, that I found greater familiarity in the topic of the conversation. There were also times when I found it more difficult to be open to the topic of the interview conversation as I struggled to make familiar connections with what the participant was speaking about. At such times, I found myself being drawn to my role as the researcher as opposed to a participant in the conversation, such as with Matt’s during-placement conversation regarding student discipline.

Secondly, my own horizon of understanding (as earlier) influenced my research design and participation in the conversations/data collection. In selecting conventional data collection methods I drew upon what was familiar to me based on previous research projects conducted during my previous academic studies. In hindsight, I could have explored the use of other traditions that are more dialogic, such as self-study or action-research. In my study, I acknowledge that I was a co-constructor of data collected as I was an active participant in the interviews conducted. In essence, my “historical situatedness which includes my language, culture, and prior knowledge form my prejudices that, in turn, provide the conditions for understanding as well as the limits for understanding” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 89). Despite this, I found my role as co-constructor did not become as apparent as I had hoped in the articulation of the experiences had by each participant (see chapter four). Traces of myself only appear sporadically in my case study presentation in this document and in reflection I would
have paid more attention to the inadvertent “editing out” of myself, my own contributions to the conversations and expression of meanings made by study participants. I acknowledge this is a discord between the Gadamerian theorizing of my study and analysis of the data.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

To establish trustworthiness, or to reframe with a Gadamerian lens, the goodness of the dialogue between the participants and myself, as represented via the interpretations and ideas I present in this paper, I followed Whitehead’s (2004) lead in establishing credibility, dependability, and transferability. In developing credibility, I needed to describe and interpret my own direct experiences with the topic; essentially highlighting my own experiences, including the catalyst for engaging in this project, and the prejudices that informed my *horizon of understanding* (see chapter 1). By keeping notes and including specific moments of interruption to my own understandings of the topic, I shared with the reader about the influences I brought to bear on the topic. My notes also “acted as a record of events and how my ‘horizon’ was developing” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 516) throughout this project. It is important that a reader of this study must be able to follow how (outlined as part of Step Four of analysis procedures) I arrived at the interpretations that are reported in this document.

In responding to the criteria of dependability, I document the “decision trail” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 513) that resulted in this project. I did this by extracting the philosophical principles that informed and drove this project to show “that the research is consistent with the philosophical ground determined as the foundation of the work” (Moules, 2002, p. 17) as the analysis unfolded. If my work is to be deemed dependable, and ultimately trustworthy, there should be no ambiguity about these decisions.
Finally, in establishing transferability, I am not “seeking an exactly replicable application of findings” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 175). Rather, transferability is “demonstrated in the application of the findings to other contexts from the research context, and the possibilities created by the research” (Moules, 2002, p. 16). I did this through detailing the context and providing rich description within the cases, which allows the reader to decide what the possibilities are, and the extent to which the findings are applicable to their context. For me this meant exploring connections to my own field of professional practice – that of teacher education and international field placement – and engaging with others who may find my findings as meaningful as I did at my institution and elsewhere.
CHAPTER FOUR – INTERPRETING EXPERIENCES

How good teaching is understood by pre-service teachers participating in an international field placement at a BC Offshore School is shaped by their horizon of understanding of the practice of teaching. Thus, in order to understand the study participants’ horizons, “it is important to know something about their backgrounds” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 91) such as their teacher education program focus, reasons for pursuing teacher education, their understandings of the practice of teaching and their direct experiences of teaching, as well as the rationale and preparation for pursuing an international field placement. In addition, judgements of good teaching practice as understood prior to the international placement are outlined, and I offer an interpretation of the normalizing forces used to orientate general understandings of good teaching. Based on these details I interpreted a horizon of understanding from which each participant interpreted direct experiences of teaching in an international field placement. I present this at the beginning of each case study as the “Historical Context” for each participant.

Next, I followed up with a close-up view of how each study participant interpreted the direct experience of an international field placement within their individual “historical and social contexts” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 91) to explore how general understandings of the practice of teaching were interrupted (or not). Using the six emergent categories relating to the practice of teaching – BC Context, Classroom Characteristics, School Setting, Staff Relations, Student Characteristics, and Teaching Activities – I highlight how understandings shifted (or not) in relation to familiarity and strangeness as predicted by the participants before, during and after the international field placement. For each participant I present two or three categories which highlighted most prominently how participants drew specifically on their direct experiences of teaching in developing understandings of teaching within the context of the international field
placement. The *hermeneutic circle* frames how participants made meaning by highlighting the interplay of particular experiences and general understandings of good teaching. This process of understanding is presented by describing the varying degrees of familiarity and strangeness noted by participants with analysis showing that several understandings were experienced as both familiar and strange for each participant. Gadamerian resources, including *historical conditions*, *tradition*, and *prejudices* were used to highlight how participants connected their direct experiences of teaching as encountered within previous BC contexts and new international field placement settings. In doing so, I look to surface and examine alternate *traditions* and *prejudices* about teaching while *Erfahrung* was used to highlight when experiences interrupted general understandings. This is presented as the main portion of each pre-service teacher case, entitled, “Experiences of Familiarity and Strangeness.”

Finally, in presenting the shifts in depth and complexity of understandings, as well as any new understandings of teaching to emerge, each pre-service teacher case is concluded with my interpretation of their *fusion of horizons*. From a Gadamerian perspective, these new understandings I present are understandings which were reached in conversation between the participants and myself, as well as my “conversation” with the data (i.e., my data analysis). Both “are concerned with a subject matter [good teaching] that is placed before them” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 370). Each *horizon of understanding* is presented by using participant quotes as well as my own reflections around shifts and changes in understandings of good teaching. The goal is not to seek definitive answers but rather more informed understandings of how the experience of international field placement mattered in the understandings of good teaching for pre-service teachers. This is presented as the final portion of the case study, entitled “Horizon of Understanding.”
Based on Stake’s (2005) notion of a case study, I chose to present each participant’s experience as a mini-case with a focus on the “experiential knowledge” (p. 444). The intention is to present a rich description and interpretation of each participant’s direct experiences. Cases are presented in clusters based upon the locale of the international placement for each participant (three for China and three for Thailand) as follows:

China: Molly, Cathy, and Anne, and

Thailand: Susan, Matt and Bella.

Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of individual participants and host schools, with schools being identified by their original geographical region in order to provide the reader with accurate local cultural and linguistic contexts.

In selecting language to describe the direct experiences of each participant, I used as much of the original interview dialogue as possible “as a resource for developing deeper understanding” (van Manen, 1990, p. 66) and to honour the various voices that make up the particular understandings for each individual participant in order to establish “a credible account of [their] particular horizon of understanding” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 91).

Appendix J summarizes the background of each participant while simultaneously highlighting the individual contextual details that pertain to each participant in a single table. It highlights previous schooling experiences, current ministry education documents, such as the BC Education Plan (BCME, 2015), which inform the participants’ general understanding of good teaching and their dominant view of effective teaching. As the case studies highlight, a teacher-centred understanding of the practice of teaching was not articulated; rather, student-centred conceptions, such as inquiry based teaching and personalization of learning, were dominant. This is further supported by the metaphors selected by participants to describe the practice of
teaching. Generally all metaphors speak to a perspective on the practice of teaching as one that involves guiding and leading by the side or together with the students (i.e., Travel Guide, Gardener), as well as elements of creativity (i.e., Art).

**Interpreting Molly’s Experience**

**Molly’s Historical Context**

Based within an elementary focused teacher education program, Molly hails from a family of teachers and wanted to be a teacher since childhood, but did not officially pursue teacher education because, “I was petrified of kids for a long period of my life.” After a job involving children during her undergraduate degree, coupled with an insightful child psychology course that she took at the same time, Molly realized “kids are not scary. . . they are awesome. . . I knew I had to work with kids no matter what” (Pre-Placement Interview). Currently Molly defines teaching as the opportunity for kids “to explore their own learning. . . be their own teacher” while the teacher’s role is to “help kids on their journey for learning. . . guide students, and nudge them in different directions . . . [by] giving ideas and making suggestions” (Pre-Placement Interview). This definition was expanded upon with an additional understanding that teaching also involves keeping “kids on track because there is curriculum to be met [and] there’s content that they have to learn” (Pre-Placement Interview). This speaks to a perspective situated in both techno-rational and ethical concerns.

Molly’s goal as a teacher is “to spend as little time as I can at the front talking” (Pre-Placement Interview). The metaphor Molly selected to describe teaching is “gardener” and “journey,” highlighting “a mixture of different strategies from teacher directed to shared practices to guided practice to independent inquiry” (Pre-Placement Focus Group). For her, a good teacher is someone who “can make things fun, take learning outside of the classroom on
field trips or create big projects that incorporate a variety activities” (Pre-Placement Interview). More importantly, however, a good teacher creates personal bonds and student connections, a safe, comfortable environment and, “are themselves . . . willing to be silly and let students see who they are” (Pre-Placement Interview). She focuses on the relational and wider societal role education plays when she highlights “often [teachers] are not teaching the kids content, you are teaching them how to be social, socially responsible, and to be good citizens” (Pre-Placement Interview). In referencing her own direct experiences as a student, Molly connects with an elementary teacher who she judged to be a good teacher as she made learning interactive via class pets and field trips. Being treated as a valued individual also framed Molly’s recollection of good teachers as “any of my teachers that have shown that they cared about me or supported me always stick in my brain” (Pre-Placement Interview).

Within Molly’s BC direct field placement experiences, she enjoyed the placements, especially when there was lots of interaction between herself and the students. A highlight for Molly was a grammar lesson involving the use of SmartBoard technology where students threw a ball to hit bubbles indicating parts of speech. “It was total chaos and I loved it, and it went really well. They all learnt, and my supervisor ended up popping in…and he was like ‘this is really interesting!’” (Pre-Placement Interview). Molly explicitly stated “I like it when the kids are talking and it’s chaotic, I’m OK with the noise level as long as it’s productive” (Pre-Placement Interview). Finally, Molly described the direct experience of learning to teach as a “stressful whirlwind [and] insane that I was in teaching students within a month and a half of starting the program” (Pre-Placement Interview). But she also stated the practical focus and being “thrown to the sharks” in the classroom was really the only way she was going to learn because “I learn
through direct experience so getting up there and just doing it [teaching] is the way I’m going to figure it out!” (Pre-Placement Interview).

*Traditions* informing Molly’s understanding include a multi-dimensional approach to teaching, highlighting a rejection of a traditional teacher-led classroom; drawing upon current “good teaching” rhetoric via inquiry-based, learner-centred instruction (Collins & Pratt, 2011, p. 359). An ethic of care, along with humour, frames her understanding of building student rapport, as does an inherent foundation of living in a democratic society. Finally, strong, close personal relationships, as based on previous direct experiences of schooling, inform Molly’s conception of “good teaching” in the present.

In terms of the international field placement, Molly was placed together with another participant in a foreign national elementary international school in northeast China teaching at the upper elementary level. Molly applied for the opportunity to “know if I want to teach internationally when I graduate” (Pre-Placement Interview). Molly also loves to travel, and felt the opportunity was a good way to combine teaching and travelling. In relation to China and the BC Offshore School system, Molly admitted to not knowing a lot but had some background direct experience of Asia from a high school exchange to Japan. She stated “I’m going to have to do a lot of observing [in China] before I open my mouth because I don’t want to stick my foot in it!” (Pre-Placement Interview). However, Molly did feel her most recent teaching unit on the Terracotta Warriors allowed for the “find[ing] out more about China” (Pre-Placement Interview) and was good preparation for the international field placement.

**Molly’s Experiences of Familiarity and Strangeness**

In analyzing conversations with Molly pre-, during-, and post-international field placement, the following categories relating to the practice of teaching emerged as the most
significant: Teaching Activities (49 references), Classroom Characteristics (21 references), and Student Characteristics (19 references). Conversations and e-journal entries highlighted that experiences within each of the three categories were referenced as being both familiar and strange with during-placement experiences highlighting the greatest shift from familiar to strange, most specifically with experiences relating to teaching activities. Overall, experiences were predominantly referenced as strange (see Appendix K for a full summary of references made).

**Teaching activities – teaching will always be teaching…is it?** For Molly, elements of teaching, such as connecting with kids, lesson planning, working with the BC curriculum, and using technology to teach were predicted by her to be familiar experiences of the international field placement. With confidence, Molly expressed there may be a need to alter teaching styles, but “not drastically . . . it is going to depend on the kids in the school” (Pre-Placement Interview). The focus on familiarity in teaching continued throughout conversations during the placement where Molly found familiarity within technical teaching activities such as classroom management, student assessment, and delivering subject based content. In line with her pre-placement prediction of familiarity, she noted during the placement “the physical act of teaching is similar, teach at the front of the room while students sit in desks and learn . . . teaching will always be teaching” (E-Journal Entry One).

However, as the placement progressed, Molly’s dialogue around teaching activities began to focus more on aspects of strangeness with teaching being referenced as increasingly strange during the placement, and continued to be during our post-placement conversations. The most prominent teaching activities noted as strange included teaching PE, giving homework, using technology (or lack thereof), and the inclusion of ESL teaching practices. I interpreted Molly’s
overall comments on strangeness as focussing primarily on techno-rational understanding of the practice of teaching, especially in relation to the teaching of PE where it was determined to be strange due the small physical space, numerous safety infractions (tripping and electrical hazards) within this PE space, all of which was referred to as “the worst, or at least the most unfamiliar” (Post-Placement Interview).

However in reflecting on the direct experience during our post-placement conversation, Molly expressed insights gained from the unfamiliar teaching dynamic because “in Canada, we bubble wrap our kids a lot . . . but the kids [in China] learned to be a little more self-aware and more cautious” (Post-Placement Interview) as a consequence of the low level of attention to safety. Understandings around notions of safety in teaching PE initially directly experienced in China were understood as completely unfamiliar in relation to her previous experiences of teaching PE in BC. However, as the placement progressed, I interpreted a shift in our dialogue around the consequences of lower safety levels in PE. I do not assume Molly now believes safety is not an important consideration in the practice of teaching PE, it clearly is. But Molly’s post-placement comments indicated a shift to recognize new outcomes of a teaching practice in PE that was focused on, but less determined by safety. Based on Molly’s previous experiences of teaching she had “assumptions and expectations that [provided an] initial orientation to that which [she] was trying to understand” (Warnke, 2002, p. 315) and thus she assumed the unsafe environment in China “resulted in injuries” (Post-Placement Interview). However, the direct experience in China allowed Molly to see that such an environment could also result in greater student self-awareness of caution, thus possibly interrupting an assumption that a lack of attention to safety in PE will result in student injury or that student safety is the sole responsibility of the teacher. Whether Molly would have reached this similar conclusions within
a BC practicum, I cannot say for sure, but in the particular case of Molly’s direct experience of teaching PE in China, I interpret Molly’s experience to have interrupted her general understanding of a good PE teaching environment and surfacing different understanding around safety and PE. While safety in PE for Molly represents a particular articulation of good teaching for PE, later in chapter five, I will expand on how this issue represents a broader problematization of good teaching, particularly in relation to applications of “good” pedagogy.

Another key focus of good teaching for Molly was the inclusion of technology, as her pre-placement interview highlighted. She assumed this inclusion would continue to be a familiar teaching element while in China, however inconsistent access to Wi-Fi networks and lack of access to web-based resources, along with limited technological hardware within the classroom, led to what I interpreted as a shift in familiarity of a good teaching practice. The inclusion of technology was no longer understood as a tool used to engage students in lesson concepts as it had been in BC. Instead, it became a source of frustration and a key focal point of conversations during the international placement, but then ceased to be a focal point during post-placement dialogue. It was clear from Molly’s direct experience of the BC field placement that the use of an interactive whiteboard, a Smartboard, was a highlight. Thus, not having access to one while in China was unfamiliar: “I assumed I would have access to at least a Smartboard, but there are none in the school” (E-Journal Entry Three).

However, I interpreted a shift in understanding of good teaching in the sense that high levels of technology use no longer corresponded with better teaching. Molly stated: “Working with limited technology [in China], that’s kind of changed some ways that I teach, or like to teach. . . I’m more reliant on talking to [students] and using the whiteboard” (During-Placement Interview One). Thus by directly experiencing a teaching environment with limited technology,
Molly’s “trustworthy generalisations” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322) about technology correlating to good teaching were “pulled up short” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322). I do not know if Molly has shifted in her preference of incorporating technology within the practice of teaching, but I interpret the direct experiences of teaching in China as an opportunity for Molly to engage in a teaching environment that was in conflict with personal preferences and determinations of good practice, thereby challenging her to think differently about how a lesson could be taught successfully. This is knowledge Molly may not have encountered within the context of the teacher education program which is informed by current 21st Century notions of good teaching, which include a heavy focus on the inclusion of technology.

In general, Molly made explicit connections to previous direct experiences of the BC field placement, as well as her own direct experiences of school as a child where caring teachers were key in forming an understanding of good teaching. This informed Molly’s sense making of the direct experience of being a teacher in China, while also informing determinations of familiarity and strangeness of teaching activities. Molly’s articulation of teaching speaks to a new understanding of the complexity around the activity of teaching; moving away from the pre-placement conclusion that “teaching will always be teaching” (E-Journal Entry One). Despite the fact that Molly never explicitly questioned her understanding of “teaching is teaching,” I cannot help but wonder, is it? Molly’s direct experiences and reflections of teaching internationally seem to indicate, in my view, a similar pondering. It suggests a shift from viewing her role in the classroom as the “teacher within the classroom” to being the “educator within society.”

**Student characteristics – kids are kids…are they?** During our post-placement conversation, Molly concluded it was a struggle to allow her personality to emerge and to build
rapport with her students in China. Previous direct experiences highlighted an understanding of
good teaching, which included building student rapport, including humour and aspects of
friendship in the student-teacher relationship. But what Molly directly experienced in China was
strange as the student-teacher relationship was constructed predominantly on respect of authority
and the authoritative role a teacher has in the classroom.

The students in China didn’t want to build a rapport in the same way that the kids in BC
do. Like I found that my kids wanted to be friendly with you in some ways . . . but it
never really felt like they cared about me in the same way as my BC kids did . . . it was
very much like you are the teacher, you are the ‘be all and end all’, the authoritative
person in the classroom . . . it was very much ‘we respect her and she is the teacher and
that’s the way we treat her.’ She’s not a friend, like in a Canadian way, and I think that is
where I found the difference. (Post-Placement Interview)

This reflection of the direct experience of teaching within a context in which
understandings of a good student-teacher relationship is built on different assumptions of
goodness with respect to a cultural interpretation of what a good teacher is. Interpreted from a
Gadamerian perspective, the experience of teaching in China had Molly encounter a different
and particular understanding of what a teacher is in relation to students. When integrating this
new “particular” Molly’s general understanding of a good teacher was disrupted. According to
Gadamer (2004), such an Erfahrung experience is always negative as it highlights “we have not
seen the thing correctly” (p. 347). For Molly, this meant being placed in an unusual and
unexpected, almost uncomfortable position of questioning her understandings of what it means
to be not so much Molly as a person, but Molly as a teacher.
In reflecting on Molly’s understanding of student characteristics, she began with the notion of, “I think, as different as kids are from country to country and culture to culture, they’re still all kids. . . I’m going to see familiarity . . . this kid is just like this other kid at home. How much difference is there going to be?” (Pre-Placement Interview). However as the international placement progressed, Molly’s understanding of students made a dramatic shift from familiar to strange. Specifically, Molly described differences in the student levels of maturity, focus, engagement, and thinking, and stating that “some of the questions that the kids [in China] come up with are really compelling and interesting and well thought out. Really deep thought . . . a maturity I haven’t noticed back home” (During-Placement Interview One). However, as the conversations continued during the international placement, it highlighted further depth to Molly’s thinking about the students she taught in China. Despite her greater teaching “success” stemming from Molly’s understanding of a more mature and engaged student body resulting in better mastering of lesson content, I interpreted this as raising ethical concerns for Molly when she stated:

These kids [in China], it’s hard to always see these kids as kids because they have so much responsibility and they work so hard . . . it’s nice to teach them because they are more responsible and really engaged in their learning. But then also at the same time I kind of miss letting them be kids. (During-Placement Interview Two)

In my interpretation, Molly clearly highlights the academic successes from teaching the more focussed students in China, however it was also evident that she senses an imbalance in perspective, possibly an ethical perspective in that the students are less free to “be kids” as a consequence of being so focused on learning and schooling. It speaks to a raised sensitivity to a child’s needs and what it might mean to be “a child in the world” – something that the direct
experience within the BC Offshore placement seemed to have provoked. Initially I interpreted Molly normalizing childhood as a universal state of being in BC but our conversation during the placement highlighted a deeper thinking about understandings of childhood, and the impacts that schools have (or not) on childhood. Overall, the dialogue speaks to an awareness of this, and how Molly’s practice as a teacher impacts childhood as well. For Molly, the direct experience highlighted a personal conflict between the ease of teaching children in China and values of what childhood is or should be, something which may not be as apparent in a setting where values of childhood are grounded in similar, more widely accepted understandings, such as in BC. Thus by directly engaging with students outside of Molly’s tradition, she surfaced and was required to contend with her own prejudices that inform her understandings of childhood, which became evident in our conversation.

Finally, similar to Molly’s direct experience of teaching, I am once again interpreting her articulations of students as highlighting a complexity of thinking around what it means to be a student. For me, it indicates a move away from Molly’s pre-placement conclusion of “kids are kids” and the prediction of “how much difference is there going be?” (Pre-Placement Interview) to a broader questioning around the rights of a child, what it means to be a child, should childhood be protected, through to what happens when childhood is lost? Again, despite Molly never openly questioning her understanding of students during our conversations, I interpret our dialogue about students to highlight interrupted and subsequently different understandings of the students she teaches, or a shifting of students as a familiar aspect of teaching to strange, thereby disrupting “trustworthy generalisations” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322) about the student body.

**Classroom characteristics – a confirmation of expectations.** Understandings of classroom characteristics were briefly mentioned by Molly prior to the international placement,
where it was predicted that “the way [the classrooms] look and are set-up” (Pre-Placement Interview) would be familiar. However, by week three of the international placement, this initial conclusion of familiarity began to shift when Molly stated: “Something I noticed as unfamiliar this week is just my classroom in general” (E-Journal Entry Three) with fewer students within each class being noted as the central difference to what she had expected. Molly articulated this difference to be good as it supported on task student behaviour which led to a reassuringly predictable classroom climate that was easy to control via general understandings of classroom management taught within her teacher education program. “I have found that having a smaller class size is much more manageable in terms of behavior, circulation, marking, and personalized assistance. I am able to check in on students more frequently and can spend more time with struggling students” (E-Journal Entry Three).

From a Gadamerian perspective, the encounter speaks of Erlebnis, “experiences that conform to our expectation” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 347), as well as techno-rational, skills based, theory-into-practice framework, or tradition, which informs good teaching in teacher education. The classroom context was concluded to be familiar as teaching skills applied (i.e., classroom management techniques) correlated with their predicted outcome; the class was relatively easily managed. Consistent with my concern that such a framing of good teaching is posited in teacher education, Molly did not problematize this classroom characteristic. Instead, it was reaffirmed as good.

**Molly’s Horizon of Understanding**

Molly enthusiastically declared, “I’m so glad I had this experience . . . it was amazing!” (Post-Placement Interview) and enjoyed the direct experience in China despite initial concerns around not knowing much about China. In noting how Molly made sense of the direct
experience, Molly regularly articulated comparisons with Canada, specifically direct BC teaching experiences, while never once referring to the previous Japanese exchange experience she had during secondary school. In summarizing a horizon of understanding, as well as different understandings of good teaching, I interpreted Molly’s initial perspective of good teaching as predominantly focused on the techno-rational skills of teaching informed by the propositional and procedural knowledge, with some key ethical concerns relating to relationships with students and opportunities for students to be themselves. The problematizing of these aspects of teaching, for example the teaching of PE in China, provides a key example of Molly judging the technicalities of teaching PE to be not good, while the ethical concern of allowing students to be themselves was still the overall informing factor in determining if the PE teaching was good (despite the safety concerns she had while teaching it).

Finally, I understood Molly’s direct experience of international field placement as a fusion of horizons, “whereby our [Molly’s] own horizon is enlarged and enriched” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143), especially in relation to teaching activities. In directly experiencing a teaching environment outside of the familiar context of BC, Molly had the opportunity to engage with broader concepts, deeper understandings, and questioning around what it means to be a teacher, notions of childhood, as well as her values associated with being “a child in the world.” With sixty-five references made to “strange,” Molly primarily experienced the international placement as unfamiliar. However, my interpretation of where Molly gained the most insight was in her understanding of teaching activities – as highlighted in our post-placement conversations – where our conversation included a continued dialogue from during-placement conversation on teaching practices relating to PE (as outlined above). For me, this emphasis by Molly highlights how interruptions directly experienced during the international placement mattered in her
development and articulation of different or new understandings. This included understandings that were primarily expressed during post-placement conversations. For me, this indicated that the opportunity to directly experience a teaching context outside of what is familiar was important to Molly’s understandings of teaching, and it was also my conversations with Molly that allowed for new understandings to surface.

**Interpreting Cathy’s Experience**

**Cathy’s Historical Context**

Based within an elementary focused teacher education program, Cathy does not hail from a family of teachers, but “always wanted to be a teacher [but] I just didn’t know it” (Pre-Placement Interview) until a secondary school career survey suggested teaching was a good career option. Describing this inspiration for pursuing teaching, Cathy states: “It just seems weird to say, it’s like ‘Oh, a computer told me to be a teacher’, but obviously the computer wasn’t wrong (laughing)” (Pre-Placement Interview). It highlighted a sense of satisfaction for following through on the career choice suggestion. Cathy initially felt teaching was about learning curriculum content, but credits the teacher education program for shifting this understanding to describe teaching as being a part of a community, and “creating that family within the classroom and then learning . . . [where the goal] is for kids to walk out of the classroom and feel confident in themselves” (Pre-Placement Interview). For Cathy, a teacher is “being an adult that students can trust . . . someone that is open, and 100% there for every kid . . . by understanding each student, a good teacher is able to challenge the students in ways that can help them move forward” (Pre-Placement Interview). This speaks of an ethical perspective that situates teaching predominantly as an activity involving actions determined in relationship with students and their individual needs.
Cathy’s comments further support this perspective by describing good teaching using a “gardener” metaphor as it “provides an enriched environment and rich resources where learning opportunities can take place” (Pre-Placement Focus Group) and reasons that this builds “a safe positive place for students to come and grow in all ways, like socially, developmentally, academically” (Pre-Placement Interview). Cathy links these understandings with a particular experience as a secondary student when a former drama teacher embodied all these elements, specifically when the teacher supported Cathy in encouraging her to approach the school principal for a scholarship application. Cathy described the teacher’s actions as: “Just knowing . . . She didn’t have to do that, but it was like she knew, and . . . cared about my interests outside of her drama classes” (Pre-Placement Interview). Cathy’s description of her former teacher’s actions highlights how a previous direct experience informs her current understanding of good teaching. This is a perspective that involves good actions taken in a moment of student need.

Cathy describes the direct experience of the BC based field placement as “Oh yeah, this is what teaching is . . . I’m in the zone and I love it” (Pre-Placement Interview) with a key highlight being a unit taught on outer space as it reignited a passion for the subject and a childhood dream of being an astronaut. The teaching was inquiry based where students were allowed to ask “anything they wanted about space” (Pre-Placement Individual Interview) from which Cathy noticed themes and subsequently followed the students’ lead in exploring further topics. “I loved it because we got to have fun and explore all these questions” (Pre-Placement Interview).

Cathy describes the direct experience of learning to teach as “harder than I ever would have imagined” (Pre-Placement Interview). Cathy noted little previous consideration of all the
complexities and details that need to go into planning and delivering a lesson where “kids can walk away with the idea behind the lesson” (Pre-Placement Interview). However, since beginning a teacher education program, Cathy has gained a much greater appreciation of the amount of work teachers do, and concluded, “you have to be a special person to be a teacher” (Pre-Placement Interview).

*Traditions* informing Cathy’s understanding of teaching include current rhetoric on inquiry based and personalization of learning (BCME, 2015) while at the same time including a developmental perspective (Collins & Pratt, 2001) enacted in trust and respect for the individual student. I interpret a connection between knowing and acting with an ethical perspective on teaching with her recounting of the drama teacher’s caring nature but Cathy does not explicitly relate this to her current practice and action as a pre-service teacher.

In terms of the international field placement, Cathy was placed with another participant in a foreign national elementary international school in northeast China teaching at the mid-elementary level. Cathy applied for the opportunity due to a love of travel and living overseas (which she always imagined doing), thus rationalizing the international placement as “a good opportunity to try something like this to see what it’s like before I commit to something I’m not going to like” (Pre-Placement Interview). In relation to China, Cathy knew very little apart from reading a travel guide book, and admitted to “never really thinking about where I’m going [and] I’ll just go there and then I learn about it when I’m there” (Pre-Placement Interview); an approach used in a previous trip to India as a volunteer abroad. Similar to other participants, Cathy had little background knowledge about the BC Offshore School system. Of all participants, Cathy was the only one who had an unsupportive BC field placement university supervisor who advised Cathy not to go. But Cathy contended, “I can’t see how [the
international placement] won’t help me as a teacher because I’ll learn from the bad things and the good things, and it will help me develop my skills or teaching ideas” (Pre-Placement Interview). I interpreted this as an openness towards potential engagement in different understandings and contexts of teaching as to be encountered while in China, albeit one that was situated in a techno-rational perspective.

**Cathy’s Experiences of Familiarity and Strangeness**

In analyzing conversations with Cathy pre-, during-, and post-international field placement, the following categories relating to the practice of teaching emerged as the most significant: Teaching Activities (38 references), Student Characteristics (28 references), and School Setting (17 references). Conversations and e-journal entries highlighted that experiences within each of the three categories were referenced as being both familiar and strange, with strange being the overriding focus. The greatest shift from familiar to strange was noted in experiences relating to teaching activities (see Appendix L for a full summary of references made).

**Teaching activities – making many connections and surfacing values.** Cathy’s initial e-journal entry highlighted an understanding of the act of teaching itself as “exactly the same” (E-Journal Entry One), regardless of context. As the placement progressed, however, the categorizing of teaching as familiar began to shift towards strange, particularly in relation to the technical aspects of teaching, lack of access to technology, lesson planning resources, inclusion of ESL teaching methods, classroom management, and PE. For example, lesson planning was understood to be strange due to limited access to physical resources (i.e., curriculum documents), and digital technology to access such resources online. It became a source of frustration for Cathy, and resulted in an unfamiliar context in which to develop and generate lesson plans. She
further understood this to impede lesson planning in terms of creating fun activities and the ability to get students to “think more” (During-Placement Interview Two) via more challenging and higher quality worksheets. I interpreted the unfamiliar context to be understood as having a negative impact on Cathy’s teaching, thereby impeding her ability to be a good teacher: “For me this feeling of not knowing how to make my unit better is unfamiliar . . . back home I would have access to almost unlimited resources to enrich lessons and provide more variety for the different types of learners” (E-Journal Entry Three). I interpreted Cathy’s understanding of this experience as aligning with my concern that teacher education positions good teaching as a skills based, techno-rational activity, as Cathy correlated a general understanding of lesson planning (one which relied on technology and the inclusion of fun) with student thinking ability. This was a general understanding that was disrupted by the direct experience of generating lesson plans in a particular context outside of what was familiar.

Despite Cathy not explicitly making this connection, the direct experience of lesson planning outside the familiar BC based school placement, had Cathy note the experiences did highlight “how I actually plan at home” (E-Journal Entry Four). This comment speaks to the idea that stepping outside of one’s zone of familiarity can lead to one acknowledging some important and significant taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning contexts. For Cathy, good lesson planning became more apparent when contending with the familiar teaching activity of lesson planning within the unfamiliar context of the international placement and, interpreted from a Gadamerian perspective, highlighted a “recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 272). Cathy’s encounter in China was an opportunity to surface biases which informed and normalized her general understanding of good lesson planning.
In contending with student discipline in a multi-national student dynamic, Cathy noted a conversation in an e-journal entry around the use of corporal punishment by some families in the school. In referencing a conversation between host school teachers, she came to the conclusion: “You do nothing if you hear about spanking at home” (During-Placement Interview Two) to be a very strange and unfamiliar perspective. The conclusion was not in line with her understanding how such issues where contended with in BC; an understanding that she made by referencing the standards of practice for professional teachers in BC (British Columbia Teachers’ Council [BCTC], 2012). It speaks to the untenable position Cathy was in as “you are under oath . . . to report anything like that [but] you can’t in China, but you’re still operating in the BC school system” (During-Placement Interview Two). I interpreted a deep sense of conflict as she tried to reconcile the dilemma, but at the same time Cathy was aware of the different perspective of corporal punishment use in China where it was “not weird . . . it was normal” (During-Placement Interview Two). This did not resolve the conflict for Cathy; rather, it highlighted that the BC context was a reference point from which Cathy tried to understand the encounter and determine how to act: “I still operate under my Canadian viewpoint because that’s how I was raised, but I think ultimately you are to respect the different cultures in the school” (During-Placement Interview Two). For Cathy, I interpreted a deeper thinking that speaks of a new understanding of differing perspectives on discipline. Thus, the direct experience of the international placement found Cathy encountering differences which allowed her to compare her current “correct” understandings with a variety of alternate understandings. Interpreted from a Gadamerian perspective, the experience of student discipline in China had Cathy encounter a different particular understanding of what discipline is. When integrating this new particular Cathy’s
general understanding was disrupted, which led to a deeper thinking of her own personal values and understandings of student discipline.

**School setting – surfacing inspiration and tensions.** Cathy’s emphasis on teacher run extra-curricular/after school activities was noted as unfamiliar: “I was surprised by, and also impressed by, the amount of energy, thought and emphasis the teachers put on extra-curricular activities . . . the teachers seem to pour their whole hearts into the school, which is truly inspiring” (E-Journal Entry One). This strangeness for Cathy suggested a pre-placement understanding of the teacher’s duties within a school setting as limited to the role of teaching, and not additional investment in the institution itself or after class activities. In Gadamerian terms, Cathy’s inherited traditions and prejudices around the role of teacher in a school setting, had established a horizon of understanding from which encounters can be understood. It was from this particular vantage point that Cathy made the determination of what was familiar, or strange in this case, about the teacher’s role in the school setting and in doing so allowed Cathy to encounter alternate perspectives; perspectives that could be a source of inspiration to do things (i.e., act) differently.

Another unfamiliar element of the BC Offshore School setting was the way English language use was promoted and enforced within the school. Cathy found the use of “English Only Zone” signs and positive reinforcement via extrinsic motivators such as prizes and stickers, etc. as strange. This was noted to be in tension with values of promoting diversity, a conclusion Cathy reached by comparing the direct experience of the international placement with how French was encouraged and promoted in BC schools where students were not publicly rewarded or “penalized for speaking English [in French class]” (Post-Placement Interview). In further discussion of the experience, the unfamiliar element of distributing rewards for being “caught in
the act of speaking English” (Post-Placement Interview) in the form of collectable “English
slips” constituted strangeness for Cathy, however the value and purpose of what the action was
trying to achieve was determined to be “good” in supporting English speaking proficiency for
students. Cathy did preface the judgement with “in that context [in China] the English poster
was a good thing. . . I don’t know if it’s a lack of good teaching but I think that was a positive
thing in that context” (Post-Placement Interview). The use of this language promotion teaching
method seemed to be at odds with Cathy’s values in relation to diversity. This strangeness
suggests a tension between the propositional and procedural knowledge informing actions to
contend with a particular school characteristic (that of a student body who are not native
speakers of the language of instruction). What I interpreted as being challenging for Cathy was
her desire to help students be more proficient at the language of instruction and the methods
applied to achieve this desire. The “trustworthy generalisations” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322)
propagated by the perception that good teaching methods are value neutral and can be applied
universally, a powerful tradition informing Cathy’s understanding of good teaching, was
disrupted in China when it became evident that goodness is context dependent in relation to
Cathy’s own values informing good actions.

**Student characteristics – surfacing conflict.** During pre-placement conversations,
strangeness was pondered by Cathy in relation to special needs. “I wonder what the special
needs situation will be over there because sometimes I wonder if it’s a case of over diagnosing
[in BC] versus in other countries . . . sometimes I wonder if it’s a coddling” (Pre-Placement
Interview). Cathy’s dialogue was hesitant and uncertain in some regards and quite pointed in
others, potentially highlighting a lack of confidence to engage or to put at risk in conversation
her own conceptions and understandings for highly political student issues, such as special
needs. Although I did not explicitly inquire around opportunities to explore feelings of curiosity as they relate to special needs, I felt Cathy’s comment and lack of confidence to articulate the comment, spoke to a lack of opportunity for pre-service teachers to engage in dialogue around their own values, or prejudices (Gadamer, 2004), informing their understandings of aspects relating to teaching, such as special needs. Interestingly, however, as the international placement progressed, Cathy made no reference to how special needs was directly experienced within the placement context. Again, this could be due to her limited direct experience of engaging in conversation about her own biases and assumptions informing understandings of special needs and conflicts in how to contend with this particular characteristic of the student body.

As the international placement continued, unfamiliar elements relating to student characteristics were noted, such as a motivated student learning focus, and a greater willingness/eagerness to complete and hand in homework, when compared with Cathy’s direct experience in BC where “I would never assign homework because I knew only 1 or 2 students would actually do it . . . or it would result in more work for me as kids would lose it or stay in at recess or lunch to finish it” (E-Journal Entry Two). I interpreted a feeling of appreciation towards her students in China as Cathy recognized, and enjoyed, the direct experience of students completing homework. Through Cathy’s choice of words, it was evident to me that Cathy made the determination of strangeness in direct relation to what she had previously experienced in BC. At the same time, the direct experience did not cause Cathy to question any assumptions held around whether doing homework in the first place is a good teaching practice. It implied that the assigning and expectation of completion of homework is a powerful and normalizing tradition informing understandings of good teaching. From a Gadamerian perspective, it could be considered a confirming experience (Erlebnis), in that homework is part
of good teaching, and it was only the particular response, or actions, of the students’ response to doing and completing homework which was the interrupting experience (Erfahrung). Regrettably, I did not pursue this topic any further within our conversation.

Finally, Cathy related the motivated learning student characteristic as a homogenizing factor, which she understood as making classroom management and lesson planning easier, as it did not require individual attention to diverse behavioural and learning needs. I sensed that Cathy enjoyed this element of the student dynamic, however I also interpreted a feeling of embarrassment in enjoying the motivated student characteristic as Cathy prefaced her remarks with, “It sounds bad to say . . .” (Post-Placement Interview) when speaking about the unfamiliar student characteristic and its impact on her teaching. I am unsure if the embarrassment stemmed from the enjoyment, or a guilt from denying accommodations and lesson modifications to support individual student needs. Nonetheless, the international placement surfaced a conflict of practice for Cathy, as well as an awareness of her personal prejudices informing preference around student characteristics.

Cathy’s Horizon of Understanding

Upon her return, Cathy summarized the international field placement as: “Everything was good and all the stuff that was different was good . . . [and] the lows were issues that I would have had in BC anyway” (Post-Placement Interview) and indicated that she enjoyed the direct experience despite feeling “like a prisoner” (Post-Placement Interview) within a gated school building surrounded by dangerous urban traffic. In noting how Cathy made sense of the direct experience, Cathy consistently made comparisons with Canada, especially her previous BC placement, something which was particularly evident as she taught the same grade level in both BC and China, and concluded it was a positive thing as, “I got to see how different [the students]
are and how teaching works in BC versus how teaching works in China with those kids there” (Post-Placement Interview). In summarizing a horizon of understanding, as well as different understandings of good teaching, I interpreted Cathy’s initial perspective as articulating an ethical perspective that situates teaching predominantly as an activity involving actions determined in relationship with students and their individual needs.

By directly experiencing teaching in an international field placement, it highlighted core values of practice for Cathy. For example, the key value of student-centred teaching “definitely stayed the same. . . it was good seeing the contrast [in China] because it just reinforced . . . what I believe in more” (Post-Placement Interview) or in the surfacing of the traditions which informed her understanding of lesson planning, the promotion and teaching of English through to a recognition (and public articulation during our conversation) of “I operate under my Canadian viewpoint because that’s how I was raised” (During-Placement Interview Two). Thus for Cathy, the international placement acted as a normalizing encounter, or confirmation of what she already understood to be her horizon of understanding of good teaching.

Nonetheless, the stepping outside of Cathy’s zone of familiarity did cause greater awareness of understandings she held in BC prior to participation in the international field placement, as she learnt more about herself as a teacher in terms of approaches, techniques used, and values held. However, there seemed to be less of a focus on the questioning of values and assumptions as a teacher in general, or how it is they informed judgements of goodness in the teaching techniques employed or in the determination of good teaching actions for Cathy. Thus for Cathy, Gadamer’s resources of tradition and prejudice nicely capture the historical conditioning of Cathy’s general understanding of good teaching and the “recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 272).
In relation to understanding of good teaching, despite the experience being predominantly referenced as strange, I did not interpret fusion of horizons “whereby [Cathy’s] own horizon is enlarged and enriched” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143) in relation to the category of teaching presented above. However, where I did interpret a fusion of horizons for Cathy is in the insights and new understandings gained about her own values and biases informing her understandings and actions regarding good teaching, something that speaks to the value of directly experiencing a teaching context that is outside of the local traditions and prejudices informing understandings of learning to teach in teacher education.

Interpreting Anne’s Experience

Anne’s Historical Context

Based within a secondary focused teacher education program, Anne also hails from a teacher family and recalls, “I played school as early as I can remember . . . I was the kid that always knew I wanted to be a teacher” (Pre-Placement Interview). And after direct experiences of additional support as a student herself, Anne always took opportunities to help out in school, and recalled enjoying the social side of school the most. Anne defined teaching as “preparing students for expanding their worldviews, getting students to think critically about who they are and what their place is in this world, and taking information and transferring it” (Pre-Placement Interview). However, she was clear to state that teaching is not all about delivering curriculum content, rather, the focus is “teaching students how to articulate thoughts and how to organize their thoughts . . . find something they’re passionate about. For me I think that will always come before the definitions and content” (Pre-Placement Interview). This speaks to a perspective of teaching that involves more than the application of technical teaching skills to reach predetermined outcomes.
Anne’s metaphor for good teaching is the “travel guide” as “learning is lifelong and is a continual journey where a teacher is a guide to opening doors” (Pre-Placement Focus Group). But to accomplish this, good teaching also includes “being organized and knowing content” (Pre-Placement Interview). This highlights an understanding of teaching as having a combination of technical and ethical elements. Anne was clear to elaborate on the ethical component by stating, “I think being a good teacher has a lot to do with just being a good person... open, caring and honest. . . . almost like a good parent” (Pre-Placement Interview) as this is what establishes an environment where students have “the opportunity to take risks and ask questions and find themselves or find their place” (Pre-Placement Interview). The historical context used to reference this understanding was based on Anne’s direct experiences of growing up in a supportive community both inside and outside of the classroom, as opposed to any single teacher. For Anne, these supportive encounters informed an understanding “that when kids feel safe, they’re willing to take more risks and they’re willing to explore and I think that happens even within a community” (Pre-Placement Interview) which includes schooling. This emerging picture of Anne indicates there is a strong ethical perspective in the way in which she talks about and conceptualizes teaching, but it is one that is comfortably situated within a technical or skills based conceptualization of teaching.

The direct experience of the BC field placement was enjoyable and reaffirming for Anne with days on practicum being described as “oh my gosh, this is exactly what I’m meant to be doing” (Pre-Placement Interview). This was a sentiment she felt occurred consistently while she taught her upper level Social Studies course during the BC field placement. She defined a focal point in the understanding of good teaching as engaging with student ideas and thoughts, especially in conversation where students can talk and feel safe.
Anne described the direct experience of learning to teach as overwhelming and frustrating, especially “the inconsistencies and lack of communication between your field based experience and your classroom experience” (Pre-Placement Interview), highlighting a commonly expressed tension for pre-service teachers. However, Anne’s understanding of this tension is the challenge she faces based within a *theory-into-practice* perspective when stating “the most valuable stuff I’ve learned has been on practicum . . . you can know every educational theory, you can know all the pedagogy, but if you’re not able to have success in the classroom, then it doesn’t matter” (Pre-Placement Interview). Overall, Anne concluded that there may be problems in the teacher education program, but generally, “I’ve had a really positive experience with this program” (Pre-Placement Interview).

*Traditions* informing Anne’s understanding of teaching include direct previous schooling experiences, and a Western foundation in logic in building strong rationales informed by objective knowledge as the reference point. She also draws on a predominantly developmental perspective where effective/good teaching is planned from the learners’ perspective, and a more transmission perspective which includes a substantial commitment by the teacher to relaying the subject matter to students (Collins & Pratt, 2001). This is supplemented, however, by ethical actions of being a good person. Thus, for Anne, there needs to be a balance of both ethical and technical understanding.

In terms of the international field placement, Anne was placed in an all-boys secondary international school in northeast China teaching senior level Geography. Anne was placed individually, the only participant to be so, but still within the same city as two other participants. Anne applied for the opportunity after hearing my first announcement of the IPP program on the first day of the teacher education program. “I knew nothing about [the IPP program] but just
knew that it was something I wanted to try” (Pre-Placement Interview). Additionally, Anne was considering international teaching as a potential for employment upon graduation, but was not certain. Similar to Cathy, the opportunity to try out international teaching for a short time was ideal because “I’m a homebody and I don’t want to go overseas and hate it and not enjoy teaching because I’m not enjoying being overseas” (Pre-Placement Interview). In relation to China, and similar to the other participants, Anne admitted to knowing “sparse details [such as] it has a different government system, a tumultuous history and different empires [but] it was never really on my list [of travel destinations]” (Pre-Placement Interview). Similar to the other participants, Anne knew little about the BC Offshore School system. Despite these “knowledge gaps,” Anne summed up, “it’s going to be an amazing experience for my teaching, and for my life. I don’t feel there will be any drawbacks [and] even if I don’t enjoy it, I’m going to get through and I’m going to learn something” (Pre-Placement Interview).

**Anne’s Experiences of Familiarity and Strangeness**

In analyzing conversations with Anne pre-, during-, and post-international field placement, the following categories relating to the practice of teaching emerged as the most prevalent: Teaching Activities (29 references), Student Characteristics (15 references), and Staff Relations (12 references). Conversations and e-journal entries highlighted that experiences within each category were referenced as being both familiar and strange in both during- and post-placement conversations, with the exception of the relationship between school staff members which was referenced exclusively as strange during and after the placement. Overall, experiences were predominantly referenced as strange and, similar to other participants, the Teaching Activities category showed a marked increase in the referencing as strange during the placement (see Appendix M for a full summary of references made).
Teaching activities – an epiphany into assessment. Overall, Anne expected to see similarities in teaching activities relating to assessment, classroom management, logistics (such as teaching to a timetable), the assigning of homework and lesson planning. Overall, Anne stated, “my whole teaching experience was a lot more familiar than I thought it would be” (Post-Placement Interview). For example, in relation to implementing teaching activities, “you can do the same things you can do in BC for the most part and you have a lot of free range over what you do” (During-Placement Interview One). However, a few key direct experiences highlighted interruptions in understanding for Anne, some of which led to a problematizing of teaching activities. Similar to other participants, determinations of strangeness were made by drawing comparisons between direct teaching experiences in China to those had previously in BC. For example, the use of standardized testing was something Anne initially predicted would be very familiar, especially in relation to test structure and types of questions posed. Anne rationalized, “standardized forms of tests are very common in BC . . . because the students are completing the BC diploma they must prepare and get used to multiple choice exams” (E-Journal Entry Three). However, as the direct experience of teaching with this type of assessment unfolded in China, Anne’s understanding around the effectiveness of assessing student knowledge via standardized testing was disrupted:

I had a teaching epiphany, or something . . . I was relatively good at [standardized tests] and I liked writing them. And as a teacher, they are easy because it’s quick to mark. But with the results, my [Chinese] students got on the test, I was like that does not represent what they know in the slightest. So now I’m like what was the point? What is this testing? (During-Placement Interview Two).
In my interpretation, Anne’s conversation reflected an interruption to understandings of standardized testing as a good form of assessing student knowledge. The practice of giving such tests to assess knowledge, an understanding based on propositional and procedural knowledge acquired in her teacher education program, was not “an experience that conform[ed] to [her] expectation” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 347). Instead, the direct experience of using a standardized test within the international placement context did not align with her assumptions of the goodness of standardized tests to assess knowledge. Thus, the direct experience in China highlighted this “deception and hence [made] a correction” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 348) to Anne’s understanding of standardized testing as a good way to assess student knowledge. In analyzing our subsequent conversation around Anne’s teaching practice, I could infer her conceptualization of good assessment practices had changed as a consequence to the interruption. In stating “I’m trying to do a lot more with open-ended questions instead of those with little snippets of knowledge. . . like, more broad questions where the students can pull in different types of knowledge they remember and then apply it to their lives” (During-Placement Interview Two) speak to this.

Anne made further connections between standardized testing in general and the particular ESL student learning dynamic of the China placement classroom and consequently questioned the worthiness, or goodness, of standardized testing in gauging student understanding of curriculum material she had taught. It speaks to a problematization of the theory-into-practice paradigm, informing understandings of good teaching in teacher education, and the surfacing of a tradition informing Anne’s understanding of a good form of assessment:

I used to think it was an effective and relatively fair way to test knowledge however, I, for the first time, really saw the challenge and trickiness with the wording of multiple
choice. Many of my students did not do well because of the language and not because they don’t know the content. (E-Journal Entry Three)

In connection with this, I interpreted the experience, and the new knowledge Anne gained from the direct experience, as informing new, or different, actions as a teacher. Anne altered her actions as teacher to accommodate the new understandings she gained through the experience of using standardized tests within an unfamiliar teaching environment. This in turn altered her conception of good teaching strategies in relation to assessment. The Gadamerian resource of the *hermeneutic circle*, where one “can only understand the parts [standardized testing] in terms of the whole [assessment of learning] and **vice versa** [italics added]” (Higgins, 2010, p. 321), captured Anne’s process of understanding this direct experience of teaching in China well, as highlighted by the following statement: “I’ll incorporate that back into my teaching in Canada . . . I think it’s really, really good, not just for checking for understanding but for making sure that students are with you constantly throughout the lesson” (During-Placement Interview Two).

Thus, in trying to make sense of the experience, both as it occurred during the placement and upon return to BC after the placement, Anne connected with previous experiences in BC. Anne understood the current direct experience of ESL and standardized testing “on the basis of the situation the past [had] created for [her] and act[ed] in light of [her] understanding of this past” (Warnke, 1987, p. 39). Anne’s judgement of goodness was based on her direct experience of a particular teaching activity and sense of what was right for her students at that point in time. External propositional or procedural knowledge were not the key sources of knowledge in determining good teaching for Anne in this case; experience was.
**Student characteristics – oh, different!** During the placement, student characteristics were increasingly referenced as strange. As predicted pre-placement, Anne spoke of differences in inherent knowledge for the students taught in China, stating: “[Within] BC there’s just this underlying inherent knowledge that students have that you know they have because you’ve grown up in the same environment, or close to the same environment, and in China that’s gone” (During-Placement Interview One). Or, in relation to democracy in Canada where “ideas around voting or elections are inherent in students before coming to class because they have seen their parents or relatives participate in these processes. These ideas are foreign concepts to students [in China]” (E-Journal Entry One).

I interpreted the direct experience of engaging with a student body informed by different general understandings of what is to be learnt at school or how a society is be governed, surfaced new understandings of the BC curriculum for Anne. Specifically, the BC curriculum became increasingly problematic for Anne as the placement went on, as it “was more and more difficult to find examples to make things relevant” (E-Journal Entry One). The experience interrupted Anne’s judgements and understandings of goodness in teaching the BC curriculum by making more obvious “those things that are just kind of like ‘oh, different’, they stop you in your tracks... they just challenge those values you hold, and you’re like that’s not familiar... I would never have thought that otherwise” (Post-Placement Interview). From a Gadamerian perspective, “there is a truth that is revealed in the process of experience [i.e., *Erfahrung*]” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 152). For Anne, it involved a new understandings around the values embedded within the BC curriculum, values which can be challenged and are not universally understood. Later in chapter five, I will expand on how this issue represents a broader problematization in relation to BC/Western values.
Anne also noted a disconnect between the BC curriculum expectations around academic honesty and the Chinese cultural background of the students. For example, prior to the placement, Anne understood cheating as wrong, but during the international placement directly experienced cheating from a different perspective. Understood to be an outcome of exam-based school culture, Anne concluded “cheating, by a lot of Chinese students, is not seen as a bad thing [rather] it’s a tool that you have at your disposal” (Post-Placement Interview). The conflict arose for Anne when trying to reconcile this student perspective with the Western perspective embedded in BC curriculum, school, and the proprietorship of knowledge. Anne noted:

The BC curriculum system is based on a very different value system and trying to teach a 16 year-old . . . ‘no, cheating is not acceptable, it’s not just a tool’ . . . or like trying to teach a student plagiarism is wrong. Those concepts had never really been a thing [before] . . . so you have those conflicting values between the BC education system and China . . . It’s viewed differently. (Post-Placement Interview)

I interpreted the direct experience as causing Anne to contend with not only the values embedded in the culture of schooling, but also those of Anne’s own background and understandings of what constitutes good practice. The prejudices that informed both the BC and the Chinese understandings became more evident for Anne, generating extensive reflection within the conversations we had.

**Staff relations – teacher as social, teacher as professional.** The working environment in which the international placement occurred was noted as being strange for Anne, especially in regards to the relationship between the BC certified teachers and the locally hired Chinese staff, some of whom worked as support staff, and others as Chinese language teachers. Anne understood this working element of staff relations as creating issues as both groups “have their
own agendas, and they both have their own values within the curriculum and I think they conflict a lot of the times” (Post-Placement Interview). It speaks to Anne’s understanding of school politics that became starkly more evident within the international placement where the BC curriculum, with its embedded Western values, was being taught by Western based teachers in an environment that was dominated by Chinese/Eastern values. She interpreted the dynamic as causing tensions between the Western and Eastern based staff, a dynamic that Anne did not encounter in BC.

However, a potential outcome of this tension, Anne also encountered strange notions of friendship between colleagues (i.e., BC teachers). In China “your social circle is your working circle and your working circle is your social circle because you’re not really friends with anyone outside of that” (Post-Placement Interview). This resulted in complications for Anne in terms of the boundary between professional and personal relationships. In China, the BC staff became a key resource for companionship and friendship with little to no options outside of the school setting in seeking out individuals who “speak the same language and have the same understandings and culture as you” (During-Placement Interview One). However, with her colleagues essentially “becoming your family . . . it’s both positive and negative. There are a lot of colleagues here that are very, very close. But at the same time, when you don’t get along with a colleague there’s more of an impact” (During-Placement Interview One) as resources for friendship were so limited. Thus by engaging in a direct experience of companionship within a context in which Anne had to build relationships within a particular kind of professional network, it highlighted a general understanding for the need of companionship but also challenged the complexities of this when the friendship community was so small. I believe this was something Anne did not have to contend with during her BC based placement.
Finally, Anne also found the high turnover of staff and the subsequent hiring of newly qualified teachers to be different and another complicating factor when trying to “deal with learning how to do your job for the first time ever and living in a place you’ve never lived in” (During-Placement Interview One). The staff turnover speaks the complexity of new direct experiences for teachers, not only in terms of creating understandings around teaching but also of living and social environments, when teaching in “international” settings. Anne understood this element of the international placement as being very different, but that it led to a dynamic of support amongst the staff as “everyone had to learn to help each other out” (During-Placement Interview One). It highlighted Anne’s interpretation of the relationship between staff as a tight knit, supportive, community but also the complications of contending with the transient nature of the community, which was again, a dynamic that Anne did not have to contend with during her BC based placement. I interpreted the experience as a way to highlight different possibilities in staff relations occurring in schools.

**Anne’s Horizon of Understanding**

In terms of her overall international placement experience, Anne surmised: “The thing I liked best about China was the teaching. Being in China was neat but I don’t know if I could do it for a long term thing, but I’m so glad that I went. It was so incredible!” (Post-Placement Interview). In noting how Anne made sense of the direct experience, she, like other participants, consistently made comparisons with her previous BC teaching experiences. In summarizing a *horizon of understanding*, as well as different understandings of good teaching, I interpret Anne’s initial perspective as have a strong ethical perspective in the way she conceptualizes teaching, but one that is also comfortably situated within a technical or skills based conceptualization of teaching. I do not interpret any large or significant change to this
perspective as an outcome of the experience of international field placement. Instead, I interpret the direct experience of teaching within a setting that was outside of the familiar BC context made Anne “question a lot of values that I inherently have that I didn’t realize I had and that I’ve never questioned. . . I think [the Western values] became more obvious” (Post-Placement Interview). In referencing a specific direct experience of teaching about Tiananmen Square, for example, Anne notes: “We always think our perspective is the right perspective, but then . . . well maybe not . . . that was so interesting . . . I think I’m going to be more aware of that and the multiple values out there as I go through [teaching]” (Post-Placement Interview). Thus the fusion of horizons for Anne, “whereby [her] own horizon is enlarged and enriched” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143), was in relation to new understandings of the values and biases which inform who she is as an individual, as opposed to any specific category relating to the practice of teaching. Her Erfahrung experience around assessment speaks well to this point.

With greater references made to things that were strange in both during and post-placement conversations, Anne, like others, primarily experienced the international placement as unfamiliar. But when I reflect on my conversations with Anne, I am struck by the numerous deeply reflective comments she made about teaching, students and staff. For me, this speaks of a practice of teaching that is focused on making judgements about practice in relationship with students and in deep consideration of the contextual details that make up the immediate environment that Anne is teaching in; an ethical perspective informing her understandings of teaching and the goodness within it. From a Gadamerian perspective, I interpret an openness to alternate perspectives and a willingness to challenge and put at risk the prejudices that inform her understandings of good teaching. I cannot conclude or claim this was a direct result of the international field placement experience but it may be that our conversations, and focus on the
topic of good teaching within those conversations, may have nurtured an environment “that fosters trust, listening for understanding, the expression of multiple perspectives and risk taking” (Wade & Moje, 2000, pp. 5-6) that allowed Anne to explore her understandings of good teaching in a different way than what she had previously encountered during her field placement in BC.

**Interpreting Susan’s Experience**

**Susan’s Historical Context**

Based within an elementary focused teacher education program, Susan also hails from a family of teachers and has been working with children for years, starting as a babysitter and then as a nanny. It was Susan’s mother, observing her work in a kindergarten class, who suggested teaching as a career choice. Susan was convinced to give it a try, and realized “I like being with kids and teaching is really fun . . . the students are learning, I’m learning . . . it’s really exciting to share” (Pre-Placement Interview). Despite claiming “I don’t really feel like a teacher . . . there are some people who really fit like what I see as a teacher and I don’t feel that way” (Pre-Placement Interview), Susan’s love of travel incited the pursuit of teacher education as “I wanted to travel and I was like well, they’ll pay for me to go somewhere to teach?” (Pre-Placement Interview). It was an obvious next step for Susan, who described teaching as “interaction between the teacher and students, and engagement . . . engaging with students, with their interests and inquires . . . more facilitating [than directing] learning” (Pre-Placement Interview). This speaks to a student-centred perspective situated within ethical concerns of acting well (i.e., interacting well) and in relationship with human beings. Susan’s perspective is one that does not embody a perspective on teaching as being understood as situated within propositional and procedural knowledge.
Her metaphor for good teaching is “artist” highlighting a focus on “perseverance, dedication, skill, connection with others, flexibility, adaptability, resourcefulness, responsive open-minded process resulting in product, or the process is reflecting in the product which is teaching” (Pre-Placement Focus Group). However, despite this list, Susan believes there are lots of different kinds of good teachers, noting that being an “engaged [teacher] is probably one of the biggest things for me . . . I hate when teachers are unengaged . . . [and] I don’t like it when teachers spend the whole time talking because that [is] just boring for anyone” (Pre-Placement Interview). Susan connects engagement, respect and facilitating learning as the elements of teaching “that make learning valuable and meaningful . . . so if you don’t have those pieces then I don’t see the value or the meaning in teaching” (Pre-Placement Interview). In referencing direct experiences from her own elementary school, Susan articulates that children come to school with lots of knowledge that needs to be respected. Bunching or labeling groups of students is disrespectful for her as “students are all individuals . . . still themselves, individual human beings” (Pre-Placement Interview) who deserve individual teacher engagement in who they are as people. Again, this highlights an understanding of teaching as situated within ethical concerns.

Susan’s perspective on teaching calls teachers to act in relationship, or in respect of individual students; although Susan does not explicitly state this, the connection can be made. In support of Susan’s understanding of good teaching, she highlighted a particular teacher who “raised a lot of interesting questions . . . respected us, was non-judgemental about our answers and helped us to think more . . . [and] brought in really interesting things for us to think about instead of assuming we were not able to think critically” (Pre-Placement Interview). A
perspective that does not situate teaching as technical activity where judgements of good are ascertained by predetermined outcomes.

A highlight from previous BC field placements comes from teaching two independent project units where Susan was very interested in how “students solve all their own problems” (Pre-Placement Interview) and developed more and more independence as the project progressed. Initially apprehensive about teaching from an ‘inquiry’ based stance as Susan was told by other teachers that students “won’t be able to self-direct” (Pre-Placement Interview), Susan persevered by working together with the students in setting goals and making a self-assessment contract for the various stages of the inquiry project. She described how students slowly took greater control of their own learning and resolved problems from a self-directed perspective, giving her a great sense of teaching success. This speaks to a perspective of student success that was made in relationship with individuals. Finally, Susan described the direct experience of learning to teach as difficult because:

[Sometimes] it’s hard to apply everything we learned at the university in the practicum class . . . [and] we are being observed and evaluated so it’s kind of hard sometimes to take risks when you’re being observed [but] if you don’t take risks, in my opinion, then you’re not growing as a teacher. (Pre-Placement Interview)

This speaks to a conceptualization of Susan’s teacher education program that emphasizes a theory-into-practice perspective, focusing on a techno-rational standpoint which is in contrast to her own direct experiences and understandings of teaching as outlined above seem to emphasize the ethical dimension of teaching involving actions made in relationship with students and acting well in the world. Traditions informing Susan’s understanding of teaching include a strongly Western perspective on individualism (as opposed to an Eastern collective), as well as
current notions of personalization of learning (BCME, 2015) and current notions of effective teaching being learner-centred (Collins & Pratt, 2011) as opposed to teacher-centred instruction.

In terms of the international field placement, Susan was placed in an international school in urban Thailand with two other participants where she taught at the mid elementary range. She applied for the opportunity “because it’s so interesting to go and live in another country” (Pre-Placement Interview) and felt that every pre-service teacher should do the same because “it’s the best thing ever!” (Pre-Placement Interview). In relation to Thailand, Susan knew there were elephants, Buddhists, a big tourist industry and lots of beautiful art, as well as being aware of the political protests that had recently erupted, but in general Susan knew “not very much” (Pre-Placement Interview). As for the BC Offshore School system, Susan had some prior knowledge due to a friend working at a school in China, and assumed there were similarities to the Nova Scotia curriculum-based school she had worked at in China before.

Of all the participants, Susan had the most extensive international travel and living abroad experience, having taught in China for four years, as well as for shorter stints in Taiwan, South Korea, Europe, and Central America. Susan believed the placement would make her a better teacher and person because, “I just learn so much from living overseas. . . I just don’t assume as many things as I did before [and] when you go to another country you’re reminded of how frustrating it is to be a learner” (Pre-Placement Interview). This comment exemplified the importance Susan places on learning from direct experience, and how much knowledge she gained from this kind of experience.

Susan’s Experiences of Familiarity and Strangeness

In analyzing conversations with Susan pre-, during-, and post-international field placement, the following categories relating to the practice of teaching emerged as the most
significant: Teaching Activities (25 references), Student Characteristics (16 references) and School Setting (11 references). Conversations and e-journal entries highlighted that experiences were referenced primarily as strange, with only teaching activities being noted as both familiar and strange. Overall, experiences were predominantly referenced as strange (see Appendix N for a full summary of references made).

**Teaching activities – a marginalization of previous experiences.** For Susan, elements of teaching were expressed as familiar but “not completely the same” (E-Journal Entry One) during the international field placement where she focused primarily on the technical aspects of teaching, such as teaching to a schedule, participating in field trips, and using textbook based resources and programs to deliver curriculum content. Overall, Susan understood the various teaching activities as familiar and as opportunities to “cement [and] to continue developing . . . teaching skills” (E-Journal Entry One) highlighting a techno-rational, *theory-into-practice* perspective on teaching from the pre-service teacher position.

In the same vein, strangeness was also articulated through a variety of elements relating to the technicalities of teaching, such as incorporating ESL teaching strategies/methods, less access to technology, and the ease of classroom management. Overall, Susan articulated familiarity and strangeness by comparing the direct experiences of the international placement with her previous direct experiences from BC. Interpreted from a Gadamerian (2004) perspective, Susan engaged with international placement from “a particular vantage point” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301) based on previous direct experiences in BC, highlighting “the object [teaching in this case] has already been understood in the tradition to which [we belong]” (Warnke, 1987, pp. 79-80). Thus, for Susan the *tradition* of teaching was situated within historical context of previous BC based direct experiences within her teacher education program.
This tradition, according to Gadamer, resulted in the prejudice (prejudgment) from which she interpreted the experience of teaching in Thailand. What is striking, but not surprising, is Susan’s disregard for her own understandings of good teaching, situated within ethical concerns as expressed pre-placement and outlined above. This speaks to my concern of teacher education marginalizing pre-service teachers’ understandings and knowledge gained from previous teaching experiences, which Susan had, with over five years of teaching internationally. In our conversation about teaching activities, Susan never referenced or drew upon her knowledge gained from these previous experiences.

**Student characteristics – conflicts and frustrations.** Student characteristics were a key focal point for Susan when articulating what was understood as strange for her while teaching in Thailand. Specifically, the ESL and special needs characteristics emerged as the most prevalent with the special needs characteristic being referenced as strange in relation to the lack of support for this student characteristic at her host school. Susan noted early in the placement: “I’m not sure if this school would be able to really identify students who need Independent Education Plans [IEP]” (E-Journal Entry Two). In drawing upon her direct experience of teaching in China previously, she recalled “there was no one to ask for support but if you did ask it was a huge stigma so it was better not to ask because the kids would get segregated . . . it might be similar here [in Thailand]” (During-Placement Interview Two). Thus, in one way I sensed a feeling of frustration in Susan’s inability to support students in need but it also became clear that supporting all students, regardless of need, was key to Susan’s understanding of being a good teacher:

> I like the idea that there’s a group of people who have more knowledge about certain disorders than I do in Canada; who can help in a concrete and hands-on way with
students who need it. On the other hand, I know that making a connection with every student and adapting teaching materials to help them is also the teacher’s responsibility.

(E-Journal Entry Two)

Susan noted in Thailand “there is a lot of privacy around [learning needs]. You have no access to that, which maybe you could argue is very protecting for the students” (During-Placement Interview Two). I interpreted a sense of conflict over a desire to have access to information about student learning needs to support her teaching of particular students but at the same time the stigmatization that may result from being labelled as requiring support for learning (i.e., special needs) was disconcerting for Susan. It speaks to a tension between the desire and consequences of technical processes designed to support students with special needs, such as IEPs or the standard testing procedures in BC schools for learning challenges. It is a technical process Susan clearly feels is missing in the international placement but it is also a process that conflicts with her values of individual privacy. I interpreted the experience of teaching in Thailand, which involved engaging with a student body whose special needs were not supported, surfaced the complex nature of teaching and tension of between general, means-end technical processes being applied to unique individual students.

**School setting – facilitating learning.** Overall, the school setting was understood as strange, with Susan making numerous direct and explicit comparisons between the international placement host school and her previous BC placement school. However, the strangeness focused on the school cafeteria and the serving of hot food for students. In referencing direct experiences of this school setting, Susan qualifies “this isn’t totally unfamiliar to me, as it’s similar to China, but it’s very different from the BC school I was in” (E-Journal Entry Two). The direct experience conflicted with Susan’s sense of injustice felt during the BC placement where she
encountered students who came to school hungry which she believed greatly impacted their
ability to learn. Thus, Susan noticed the cafeteria “because I like it when the kids are getting fed
at school. It just makes me feel better” (During-Placement Interview One). Interpreted from a
Gadamerian perspective, Susan understood the school dynamic of the cafeteria “on the basis of
the situation the past has created for [her]” (Warnke, 1987, p. 39). For Susan, this past included
both BC and other international contexts, however it was her most recent past, that of BC, which
informed her judgement of the school cafeteria being a good school dynamic as it was
understood to support students’ ability to learn better on a full stomach.

Finally, the post-placement conversation noted strangeness in relation to the longer
school day directly experienced in the international placement. Susan connected the longer
school day with the teacher contract and the independent school dynamic concluding: “It’s a
private school so they can say we want you here from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, which I guess they
can’t do in BC public schools. It’s just a different system” (Post-Placement Interview). On
initial engagement with Susan’s understanding, I aligned the comments as a negative stance
generating, I assumed, a sense of frustration for having to stay at school for longer hours.
However, in further reflection, I also sensed an ethical conflict for Susan in that such a school
setting infringes on students’ free, non-school time and her time as teacher with duties to
perform. “I don’t even know what the students were doing . . . was it for daycare or extra foreign
teacher time? . . . but I felt bad to say, I’m planning now, please go away” (Post-Placement
Interview). Nonetheless, the conclusion around the different school setting, its impact on the
teaching schedule and number of hours spent in the school by teachers “just makes it really
different from the mad house that I experienced in BC” (Post-Placement Interview).
**Susan’s Horizon of Understanding**

In summary, Susan stated: “I don’t know if my understanding of good teaching and education has shifted or changed. I don’t think it did . . . my core values stayed the same” (Post-Placement Interview). In noting how Susan made sense of the direct experience, she made comparisons between previous experiences had in BC, as well as those from previous international teaching jobs. It was only making sense of the teaching activities category that Susan exclusively referenced her previous BC based field placement and did not to make comparisons with her previous international teaching jobs. In summarizing a *horizon of understanding*, as well as different understandings of good teaching, I interpreted Susan’s initial perspective of good teaching as being predominantly situated within ethical concerns, which she continued to draw upon in during and post-placement conversations. It was only within the one category of teaching activities that she focused on a techno-rational, *theory-into-practice* perspective. However, what occurs to me is that this shift in focus for Susan may have been in response to my position as a teacher educator discussing field placement. Despite the international field placement having no formal evaluation component from my Faculty, I still represented the Faculty by the virtue of my employment within the teacher education program in which Susan was a pre-service teacher. Thus the *tradition* informing how Faculty engage in conversation with pre-service teachers around the field placement is from a *theory-into-practice* perspective focusing primarily on the teaching activities, and not ethical concerns or complexities of making decisions for particular students with particular individual needs. From this perspective, I interpreted Susan’s marginalization of knowledge gained from previous teaching experiences and disregard of ethical considerations in understanding teaching activities as the *historical conditioning* from which she spoke about teaching activities. Furthermore, I
interpreted my presence, as not only the “researcher” but also as a faculty member, as having an influencing factor on how Susan spoke about her experiences, particularly with those relating to teaching.

Finally, I interpreted Susan’s understanding of the international field placement, and by extension Susan’s understanding of good teaching, as not one based on judgements of right/wrong or better/worse in relation to the application of technical skills, but one that highlights differences in understanding in which there is a continual process of revision of understandings, or a constant fusion of horizons. Through the consistent use of “I don’t know” following statements of observation and conclusions made, I interpret a recognition of the limitations of her individual perspective and the need for continual openness towards new understandings and alternate perspectives in “extending, refining, and amending [her] generalisations, not through jettisoning them” (Higgins, 2010, p. 320). For example, when judging teacher busyness and workload within the international placement, Susan qualified conclusions reached with “I don’t think I have enough information to decide if it’s good or bad” (Post-Placement Interview). In my view, this is a perspective that identifies there is no one “right” answer to good teaching, and in Susan’s attempt, to paraphrase Burbules and Bruce (2001), to build upon the understanding of others requires acceptance or tolerance of alternate perspectives.

**Interpreting Matt’s Experience**

**Matt’s Historical Context**

Based in an elementary focused teacher education program, Matt also hails from a family of teachers and, from the age of 13, remembers stating “I wanted to be a teacher . . . it’s always been in the back of my mind” (Pre-Placement Interview). However, actively engaging in a
teacher education program took time for Matt, who spent a number of years traveling and teaching overseas upon the completion of an initial undergraduate degree “to flush out and explore that kind of [career] area” (Pre-Placement Interview). Matt defined the practice of teaching as “making connections with kids as nothing really happens without that and if you can do that successfully then things can click” (Pre-Placement Interview). Matt also feels teaching is one of the most important professions in a community as it is important for students to have a sense of belonging. Matt elaborated on this by stating “instilling good character, not indoctrinating them in a certain way of doing something but it’s about, you know, allowing students to find their own way to be a good person in life. . . good character building” (Pre-Placement Interview). Struggling to come up with specific examples of such characteristics “because it’s so individual” (Pre-Placement Interview), Matt settles on empathy, self-confidence, and self-trust. Reflecting on the content of Matt’s dialogue and the inclusion of goodness and the notion that goodness is difficult to define as a generality for people, his comments reflected an awareness of the ethical elements of teaching. However, Matt’s dialogue also highlighted a sense of trepidation and hesitation in articulating such a perspective, as Matt paused often to speak and expressed what I interpreted as a sense of fear or embarrassment in speaking about his core values.

Matt’s metaphor for good teaching was “gardener” and “travel guide” where the teacher is a “helper [and] facilitator providing a safe environment . . . but perhaps more of a co-learner” (Pre-Placement Focus Group). A good teacher for Matt is someone “who is active in always finding ways to connect with kids . . . and brings a sense of energy and passion to the profession” (Pre-Placement Interview). This speaks to a perspective that focuses on the importance of relationships, which Matt connected with previous direct experiences with a grade five teacher.
who embodied such elements. However, Matt highlights a current teacher education methodology instructor as another key reference in his understanding a “good teacher;” one that embodied a *theory-into-practice* perspective which Matt described as the clear presentation of lesson learning intentions, class schedule, good lesson closure and a returning to themes covered in the previous lesson (Pre-Placement Interview).

Despite an initial adjustment to teaching children versus the adults taught during previous overseas teaching jobs, Matt described the BC based field placement as fortunate because he felt his sponsor teacher was “the kind of teacher I want to be, my sponsor teacher is that in practice in a lot of ways” (Pre-Placement Individual Interview). This provided Matt with an opportunity “to see how it works rather than kind of clumsily trying to find that out for myself” (Pre-Placement Interview). Similar to Cathy, a key highlight was teaching an inquiry-based math unit where students were free to ask questions and “I guided those questions in a general direction and by the end I don’t think there wasn’t anybody who didn’t have a good understanding. That was really great” (Pre-Placement Interview). Finally, Matt described the experience of learning to teach as being fragmented due to the various on-campus class work demands and off-campus field placement expectations. Matt reflected that the experience required balance in “my desire to help and fitting in with my roles as educator. . . I think it’s been really important for me figure out who I’ll be as a professional and what the responsibilities of that actually are” (Pre-Placement Interview). *Traditions* informing Matt’s understanding include a biasing of strong human relationship and connection between the students and the teacher; bridging between the individual student and the curriculum to be taught, and a valuing of schooling as a public good for society. This embodies a developmental perspective where good teaching is planned and conducted from the student point of view where the teacher is also highly skilled practitioner of
what they teach (Collins & Pratt, 2001). However, a *theory-into-practice* approach greatly informed his perspective on learning to teach within the context of teacher education.

In terms of the international field placement, Matt was placed in an international school in urban Thailand where he taught at the mid elementary range. Placed together with two other participants, Matt applied for the opportunity as it related to previous international study abroad and direct teaching experiences in Japan where Matt enjoyed the daily “intense concentrated learning” (Pre-Placement Interview) while living in another country. Consequently, he seized the opportunity to engage in such an opportunity again. Matt also pursued the international field placement as an opportunity to teach at another grade level in order “to see the breadth of an elementary school” (Pre-Placement Interview). In relation to Thailand, Matt purposely did not seek additional travel or cultural information prior to departure due to a desire “to experience being there in the raw” (Pre-Placement Interview). Matt disagreed with trying to learn “all this Thai stuff prior to going [as] I think it’s really important to approach a new culture with a sense of humility” (Pre-Placement Interview). In terms of the BC Offshore School system, and similar to the other participants, Matt knew scant details but commented that “it is an innovative way for the [BC] provincial government to make money” (Pre-Placement Interview).

**Matt’s Experiences of Familiarity and Strangeness**

In analyzing conversations had with Matt pre-, during-, and post-international field placement, the following categories relating to the practice of teaching emerged as the most significant: Teaching Activities (18 references), Student Characteristics (16 references), and School Setting (8 references). Conversations and e-journal entries highlighted that experiences within teaching activities and student characteristics were referenced as both familiar and strange during the international placement, while pre-placement references only highlighted the school
setting as strange while post-placement references focused exclusively on teaching activities as strange. Overall, experiences were predominantly referenced as strange. However, unique to Matt, the teaching activities category was referenced as mostly familiar during the placement (see Appendix O for a full summary of references made).

**Teaching activities – providing comfort.** Teaching activities for Matt were predominantly understood in relation to the BC context of the host school but it was not the focus on the technicalities of using the BC curriculum and resources that generated a sense of familiarity for Matt, rather it was the shared direct experience of being educated by BC curriculum and resources. It formed a shared historical point of familiarity. Furthermore, the direct experience of being in a school setting framed Matt’s understanding of teaching activities as familiar when stating: “I feel my teaching [in Thailand] is simply an extension of my last practicum as I am continuing to teach in a similar/familiar environment to my BC based practicum” (E-Journal Entry One). Even by the third week of the international placement, Matt continued with “as far as school goes, it’s still hard to think of anything strange or different” (E-Journal Entry Three). Overall, Matt articulated the international field placement as an opportunity to expand upon teaching activities “in order to develop who I am as an educator” (E-Journal Entry One). I interpreted Matt’s conclusions about his direct experience and understandings of teaching to be situated as predominantly within propositional and procedural knowledge which was universally applicable regardless of school contexts and settings. The placement was perceived as an opportunity to further acquire such knowledge.

This was further supported during our first during placement interview, where Matt judged teaching in the international placement to be “even more familiar than the practicum I was in in Canada” (During-Placement Interview One), something he also attributed to working
together with a sponsor teacher who was a recently qualified BC teacher. Matt understood the
closeness to stem from his own position of being in the middle of a teacher education program
and the sponsor teacher’s close proximity to this dynamic in only having recently graduated from
the same context. Matt related this dynamic as resulting in shared similar understandings around
teaching practices and a familiar teaching philosophy: “the sponsor I have in Thailand, is very
much in line and the class runs very much in line with a lot of the concepts that we went over in
our [teacher education] classwork. So that’s comforting, very, very comforting” (During-
Placement Interview One). Interpreted from Gadamer’s (2004) Erlebnis notion of direct
experience, the international placement in terms of teaching activities was one “that conforms to
our [Matt’s] expectation” (p. 347) of understandings previously constructed within the BC
context of his teacher education program.

Of the activities of teaching that Matt understood as strange, the focus was on assessment
of student understanding in relation to ESL teaching strategies. The strangeness was noted in
comparison with procedural knowledge and how his sponsor teacher would “do pronunciation
work . . . I didn’t see any of that in Canada. Seeing it in Thailand solidified my recognition and
understanding that ongoing assessment throughout any lesson is really important . . . making sure
everybody’s understanding things [is] a good principle to follow.” (During-Placement Interview
Two). I interpreted this observation as being more concerned with the amassing of procedural
knowledge around ESL teaching methods than Matt’s own actions as a teacher using these
methods in relationship with students. Again, it speaks to Matt’s biasing of procedural and
propositional knowledge emphasizing a techno-rational or “what works” perspective in
determining understandings of good teaching, which is not surprising in a beginning teacher.
However, it was during Matt’s post-placement interview that a sense of strangeness began to emerge in relation to teaching activities. I interpreted a disconnection for Matt between the BC curriculum, the associated teaching resources, and the Thai students he was teaching. Recalling a direct experience of teaching a unit on light refraction, Matt noted a textbook example referring to a fisherman throwing a spear at a salmon in the Fraser River in BC and pondered: “the kids in Bangkok are reading this and I just kind of chuckle. . . I asked the students, it’s the Fraser River, you know about that? (laughs)” (Post-Placement Interview).

Thus, despite the familiarity of the BC curriculum and textbooks, Matt sensed a conflict in the universal application of BC resources and the particular context of the students he was teaching in Thailand. Although our conversation did not occasion any explicit language referencing difference in values or ethical concerns relating to this teaching interaction, I interpreted Matt’s laughing and sense of ridiculousness in expecting Thai students to grasp a very uniquely BC context as an opportunity to problematize his understandings of good teaching in relation to curriculum resources. Thus, there was a definite but perhaps only partially articulated sense of difference related to the distinctly unique cultural contexts of BC and Thailand. This pointed to an ethical dilemma for Matt in the unproblematic transfer of knowledge in one context to another and, as such, interrupted the techno-rational assumption that knowledge is independent of context.

School setting – conflicting cultures and tensions amongst staff. In terms of the physical school setting, Matt understood various dynamics such as the classrooms and building layout, to be very familiar and stated “there is nothing here to hint this school is not in British Columbia” (E-Journal Entry One). Matt expressed strangeness in relation to staff relations in the school setting, specifically the divisions amongst staff at the host school. Matt noted divisions
between the English speaking, predominantly BC based teachers, and the Thai school administrators and support staff. Matt understood this strangeness primarily in relation to language and communication, but also noted more broadly the unique nature of the school setting: a BC curriculum based school operating within the context of Thailand.

Although the school operates in English, and the staff, students, and teachers have few problems communicating, the fact remains that the school functions within the context of its surrounding environment. The bubble, which seemingly extends across the school grounds, is met sharply with the cultural and language barriers of the greater society.

(E-Journal Entry One)

Despite Matt primarily situating understandings of teaching within a propositional and procedural knowledge frame, I interpreted a recognition of the limitations of applying such an understanding within the broader society in which the school is based. It speaks of a tension, or conflict, in understandings of schooling and how such understandings are negotiated and interpreted in different international contexts.

Another element of the school setting to be referenced as particularly strange for Matt was the context in which discipline was set. Focusing primarily on the context of his classroom within the school and how his sponsor teacher managed the class, Matt was conflicted about the form of discipline that was employed; the incorporation of student embarrassment. Matt explained that he wrestled with it “the whole time because I thought, OK, surface value that kind of really rubs me the wrong way” (Post-Placement Interview). Initially, Matt interpreted his sponsor teacher’s classroom actions as very strict but positive as they correlated with the positive outcome of students being great “self-starters” with an ability to “do their own thing” (Post-Placement Interview) and in alignment with a school setting that focused heavily on academics
and grades. However, as our conversation progressed, a shift in understanding began to emerge, which I began to interpret as an ethical tension for Matt as he began to question the correlation between strict classroom management and student outcome. Consequently, he spent “a lot of time kind of looking at the strangeness from different angles” (Post-Placement Interview) and upon return from the international placement concluded, “it’s not something I would ever feel comfortable doing” (Post-Placement Interview). It speaks to a shift in understanding for Matt, one I interpreted as a problematizing of the assumption that understandings and actions of good teaching can be universally learnt in teacher education programs and applied in the field placement. Interpreted from a Gadamerian perspective, the experience within a different school setting had Matt encounter a different understanding of good classroom discipline. An Erfahrung, an interruption to what had been previously understood, that was comparable to Matt’s previous understandings of good classroom discipline, but one that concluded to be incompatible and incommensurable in light of the new direct experience he had in Thailand. The knowing or understanding Matt gained in this Erfahrung was not replicable or testable, rather it surfaced the ethical dimensions that came into play for Matt.

**Student characteristics – reflecting on maturity levels.** In general, Matt understood the students taught during the placement as “children, you know, 10 years old. It’s not like they are a different species. They’re kids just as the kids at home are kids” (During-Placement Interview Two), again noting an understanding of kids as a universally applicable concept.

In noting differences in student characteristics, it was apparent in relation to higher age and maturity levels of the students Matt was teaching in Thailand versus the lower grade child he taught in BC. Thus, in trying to understand the different student characteristics directly experienced within the international placement, Matt referred to his previous understandings of
students as directly experienced in BC and concluded that the difference was “probably more to
do with their age . . . the grade, rather than [the students] being from a totally different culture
and country” (During-Placement Interview Two). This difference was further understood as the
Thai students having a greater ability to put their biases and assumptions that informed their
understanding at risk, or “ways of doing things” (E-Journal Entry Four) in the classroom. It
implied a perspective that the younger students were not as “schooled,” or had not accumulated
as much “school knowledge.” Consequently, they were more flexible in doing things at school.
Although Matt did not explicitly state this, I could conclude that he understood this student
characteristic to be a consequence of the age and number of years spent in school as opposed to
differences in cultural backgrounds of students, thus a largely technical issue. Also, Matt’s
process of understanding these characteristics speaks to the Gadamerian resource of *historical
conditioning* which provides an “initial orientation to that which [Matt was] trying to
understand” (Warnke, 2002, p. 315), such as Matt’s previous encounters with Thai students’
counterparts in BC.

However, through a direct experience where middle school students disturbed his class,
Matt understood these student actions as “bad manners and I don’t know if it’s a Thai [cultural]
thing” (During-Placement Interview Two). Thus, in trying to make sense of this student dynamic
which did not conform to his general, universally applicable understandings of students, he
positioned the strangeness in relation to cultural differences, thereby highlighting a challenge to
the universal application of his understanding of student characteristics. The sentiment speaks to
an understanding of students as a certain, harmonized and a consistent aspect of teaching. It also
supports an understanding of teaching as a problem solving activity where student difference is a
problem of practice that can be corrected via the application of the right theory.
Matt’s Horizon of Understanding

In summary of the experience, Matt enthusiastically declared: “Everything was fantastic and I can’t really think of anything that went wrong” (Post-Placement Interview). In noting how Matt made sense of the direct experience, Matt consistently drew upon experiences had in BC while never once drawing upon his direct experience of teaching internationally prior to beginning his teacher education program. Overall, Matt noted understandings of familiarity and strangeness in relation to direct experiences of teaching within his previous BC field placement, and good teaching as understood from the techno-rational, *theory-into-practice* paradigm dominating his teacher education program. As outlined above, Matt’s sense making personifies my concern of teacher education programs marginalizing pre-service teacher knowledge and the reliance on propositional and procedural knowledge in determining good teaching.

Based on this observation, I interpreted the key *traditions* and *prejudices* informing Matt’s *horizon of understanding* of good teaching as being those situated within his most recent direct teaching experiences – that of his teacher education program and the BC based field placement – and not knowledge gained from previous direct experiences of teaching internationally. Throughout the placement, I interpreted Matt as taking on a problem-solving approach in trying to understand the differences encountered. These were problems that Matt tried to reconcile via the application of propositional or procedural knowledge. As Bullock (2011) outlined, “the technical rational assumptions underlying most teacher education programs do not prepare candidates to learn from experience” (pp. 34-35). In interpreting how the direct experience of an international field placement informed Matt’s understanding of good teaching, I concur with Bullock’s assertion. Consequently, the direct experience of international field placement could predominantly be interpreted as an *Erlebnis* experience which “conform to our
expectation and confirm it” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 347), thus enabling Matt to collect more propositional and procedural knowledge, and thereby allowing him to have “seen enough of a something [teaching] to be able to make trustworthy generalisations about it” (Higgins, 2010, p. 323).

Matt’s initial articulation of good teaching included a focus on strong human relationships, connection between the students and the teacher, and a valuing of schooling as a public good for society. I am thus somewhat puzzled that Matt’s conversation during the international placement did not reference this perspective more. But it occurred to me that Matt engaged in our conversation from the tradition of a pre-service teacher engaging with Faculty (such as myself) about his teaching and the field placement experience, one that is greatly informed by a theory-into-practice perspective which focuses primarily on the techno-rational skills and the application of skills in the field, and not the ethical concerns or complexities of making decisions for particular students with particular individual needs, such as Matt’s pre-placement conversation highlighted. Thus the horizon of understanding from which conversations about direct experiences of teaching within teacher education, such as that between Matt and myself, is situated within this tradition and informing how dialogue about field placement in teacher education is understood.

Finally, I was struck by the fact that there was nothing overt in Matt’s direct experience of the international field placement as a fusion of horizons, “whereby our [Matt’s] own horizon is enlarged and enriched” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143). I concur with the idea that the experience of student discipline was an interruption for Matt, but I struggle to articulate what it was that arose anew, and makes me question my own openness and willingness to put at risk my own biases and assumptions. If the successful “conclusion of a dialogue results in one’s position being
informed by others and reaching new understandings (and not solely reproducing the partner’s knowledge)” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 38), I call into question my own willingness to allow my position to be informed by Matt’s. As a novice researcher, I may have missed, or fumbled, the potential opportunity for horizons to fuse for Matt, due to my own inability to facilitate a genuine conversation.

**Interpreting Bella’s Experience**

**Bella’s Historical Context**

Based within an elementary focused teacher education program, Bella’s inspiration for becoming a teacher stems from an interest “in all different subject areas [which] made me think maybe I should be a teacher and then I can kind of dabble in everything [and concluded] what better way to learn about something than to teach it!” (Pre-Placement Interview). Bella describes teaching as “giving students a tool kit rather than, you know, actually showing them exactly what to do . . . give them the tools to make the decisions for themselves or what they need to do or where they need to look to find information” (Pre-Placement Interview). She concluded that a teacher is a facilitator or guide for learning as “you’re never going to teach students everything so you need to teach them to be effective learners . . . to make decisions for themselves” (Pre-Placement Interview). Bella connects the process and technicalities of her role in teaching students but believes ultimately it is the student who makes the decision of which actions to take. This challenges the assumption that propositional and procedural knowledge in teaching can provide certainty and that ultimately teachers needs to work in relationship with individual students. This speaks to a perspective of teaching as situated in both techno-rational and ethical considerations.
Bella’s metaphor for good teaching is “travel guide” where the “teacher is a learner engaging in discussion, a storyteller and leads discovery based activities. The journey in question is not a novelty” (Pre-Placement Focus Group). A good teacher is described as someone who “doesn’t inject too much bias into the material, but instead . . . teaches kids how to look at things with a critical eye and decide for themselves” (Pre-Placement Interview), an understanding that Bella connects with questioning versus telling as the method to achieve success. She recalls her own direct schooling experiences in forming this understanding where she did not believe “everything I heard [and] I tried and find out for myself” (Pre-Placement Interview). It speaks to a rejection of accepting propositional and procedural knowledge as the sole sources of information regarding understandings of good teaching. It highlights a recognition and respect for the individuality of the student thereby allowing for flexibility (versus predetermined action) in relation to good teaching that supports students as individuals.

In respect to Bella’s BC field placement, she summarized that it went really well with “good feedback from both my sponsor and my supervisor and I got feedback that I could actually use” (Pre-Placement Interview). Bella’s articulation of the BC field placement focused greatly on the direct experience of lesson planning, which lead to the recollection of a key teaching highlight of a good math lesson. “I used a lot of PowerPoint slides, brain teasers, and tangible examples . . . so that was fun” (Pre-Placement Interview). Incorporating a variety of teaching strategies is key for Bella in determining a good lesson, as is having fun. In another key example, Bella recalls a direct experience of a lesson involving the decoration of “ugly” Christmas sweaters. Bella noted she provided sweaters for each student as to not single out students who could not afford to bring one, highlighting a consideration to build an equitable classroom environment. However the technical aspects of teaching are also of consideration for
Bella as the goodness of this lesson also came from “really prep[ing] up everything . . . it was a good [lesson] because it was fun but still productive . . . it was a practical lesson but it was presented in a fun way . . . it was fun for them and part of the classroom culture” (Pre-Placement Interview). This notion of lesson preparation and task completion speaks to a technical focus but Bella also infuses a recognition of creating conditions for all students to participate and building a community specific to the class taught.

Bella described the direct experience of learning to teach as “up and down . . . probably one of the most intense . . . not because the content is difficult, it’s the preparation workload . . . and walking into things feeling completely prepared” (Pre-Placement Interview). This highlights an emphasis on the value of propositional and procedural knowledge in developing good lessons. A perspective not so much from Bella’s own choosing or understanding, rather, one that has been imposed on Bella by the school and the teacher education program in which she is based. It also reflects pre-service teachers’ expectation that they should know everything in advance. However, Bella added that the process had also been reflective, which revealed who “I want to be and the person I want to mature into” (Pre-Placement Interview). Thus, a sense of self and what matters to her as a human being, an ethical perspective, also informs her understanding of good teaching.

*Traditions* informing Bella’s understanding of the practice to teach include a technicalization of the learning to teach process (one situated within teacher education, with a general understandings of good teaching as propositional and procedural knowledge) informed by a techno-rational perspective of teaching, as well as her own understandings of what it means to be a good person working in relationship with students. She articulated a developmental perspective where good teaching was conducted from the learners’ perspective; challenging students to move from simple to more complex forms of thinking (Collins & Pratt, 2001).
Similar to Matt, this perspective is coupled with the notion that a good teacher is a highly skilled practitioner, who is able to ascertain what learners can do on their own and where they may need guidance (Collins & Pratt, 2001). Overall, I interpreted Bella’s understanding of good teaching to be situated within propositional and procedural knowledge, but with a sensitivity to individual student needs. In short, expert knowledge and skills that are to be applied in the context of the classroom to support students.

In terms of the international field placement, Bella was placed in an international school in urban Thailand, where she taught Math and Social Studies at the lower secondary level, areas specifically chosen to expand her teaching resume beyond the elementary focus of her current teacher education program. Placed together with two other participants, Bella applied for the placement as an opportunity to return to Thailand “because I’ve been there before [and] Thailand’s a kind of place I associate with not really having to worry about anything . . . get away from the Western rush-rush” (Pre-Placement Interview). The opportunity also supported her career goal of teaching internationally upon graduation from the teacher education program. As a consequence of Bella’s previous direct experiences of Thailand, she expressed slightly more background knowledge of the country than the other participants. She also had an awareness of the BC Offshore School system; for example, the countries that host BC Offshore Schools and their salary scales. Bella concluded that the Thai field placement “is a good way to get your foot in the door of international education [and] a lot of new teacher grads do that to pay off their student loan” (Pre-Placement Interview). An added benefit for Bella was the opportunity to directly experience urban life “because I come from such a small town” (Pre-Placement Interview).
**Bella’s Experiences of Familiarity and Strangeness**

In analyzing conversations with Bella pre-, during-, and post-international field placement, the following categories relating to the practice of teaching emerged as the most significant: Teaching Activities (23 references), Student Characteristics (12 references) and Staff Relations (10 references). Conversations and e-journal entries highlighted that experiences within both teaching activities and student characteristics were referenced as being both familiar and strange during the placement, while staff relations was noted exclusively strange. Post-placement conversations continued to reference teaching activities as both familiar and strange while staff relations continued to be referenced as strange. Overall, experiences were predominantly referenced as strange (see Appendix P for a full summary of references made).

**Teaching activities – a focus on language abilities.** Overall predictions of familiarity were related to connecting with teens again (an age group Bella was comfortable with and had previously taught), working with the BC curriculum and resources, being in a classroom setting, working with a sponsor teacher, and having teacher education program cohort members present. During the placement, however, the key teaching activities noted to be directly experienced as very familiar included the act of lesson planning, with Bella stating that she was “used to the system of planning I employed in BC” (E-Journal Entry One), and subject area teaching, especially in relation to math and Social Studies. Familiarity was determined by connecting to previous direct experiences of Bella’s BC field placements highlighting Gadamer’s (2004) notion of our historical context framing our interpretation of the present.

Strangeness of teaching activities was predominantly understood in relation to contending with the ESL nature of the international placement and having to scaffold words and concepts for the students while teaching. As a consequence, Bella concluded: “I am hyper aware of every
word that I use. It makes me really think deeply about clarity of concepts. On the negative side, it allows me to only scrape the surface of something that is very complex” (E-Journal Entry One). It speaks to an awareness of the importance of language in generating understanding, a notion that is central for Gadamer (2004) as language is the medium by which understanding is made visible. However, Bella’s conclusion that the language barrier was negative speaks to an assumption that the understanding of school concepts is dependent upon English proficiency, and ignores the possibility that students could be comprehending concepts on a more sophisticated level in their native Thai language. This is a perspective that Bella did not articulate. Instead, I interpreted Bella to understand the experience of contending with ESL learners to be a benefit in increasing her propositional and procedural knowledge in terms of expanding her repertoire of teaching strategies. She concluded that the experience “made my teaching more dynamic” (Post-Placement Interview). This potentially speaks more to a techno-rational understanding and *theory-into-practice* perspective of teaching.

However, in further reflection, Bella also spoke about commitment to ensure every student understood the English and concepts she was teaching about, which she explained via the extensive efforts she made, such as rewriting “chunks of the textbook in simpler terms . . . [or adding] funny pictures, just to keep the students interested!” (Post-Placement Interview). She also observed that she was not just teaching curriculum content as the students were “learning about all sorts of facets of Western culture and how that translates into English” (Post-Placement Interview). This spoke to Bella’s view of teaching as not only being concerned with the technical skills of delivering curriculum, but of the ethical responsibility she felt towards meeting the needs of all her students in Thailand (regardless of language ability) and the values embedded in the curriculum she was teaching. She concluded: “I think in the future, even in teaching
English speaking kids, I will not take that understanding for granted” (Post-Placement Interview).

**Student characteristics – connecting with student backgrounds.** In understanding the characteristics of students, Bella primarily referenced her experiences of the international placement as strange. Most prominent was Bella’s perspective on the private school setting, and the subsequent student characteristics she believed stemmed from this context. Specifically, Bella understood the private school context as having the potential of making the students self-centred and demanding as “the students and parents are paying customers . . . [which] means that there is a certain expectation and culture surrounding the whole idea of education” (E-Journal Entry One). Although Bella did not explicitly state what those expectations were, her comment alluded to the connection between the unique school context and student expectations of what the school (and teachers) are to provide. Furthermore, in making sense of the BC Offshore School context of the international placement, (one which uses public BC curriculum in a private school setting), I interpreted this conflict to be centered on Bella’s values and understandings around the purpose and uses of curriculum developed for use in public education. This conflict and competition of values became more obvious for Bella, and was something she may not have noticed as overtly within the context of her BC field placement.

As the international field placement progressed, the student dynamic continued to emerge as strange through a variety of elements, such as the level of student engagement, a greater focus on marks, the ESL background, the lack of special needs designations, and approaches to learning and thinking by students. In relation to special needs, and similar to other participants, Bella found it strange that students with special needs were not openly recognized via IEPs or discussed amongst teachers. Overall, Bella found the experience of not knowing a student’s
diagnosis disconcerting, because “I could have made [supporting] lesson accommodations” (During-Placement Interview Two). Increasing to Bella’s sense of frustration, was finding out the reason why she did not know about the student’s diagnosis, which was due to the male gender of her sponsor teacher and the parent being uncomfortable in sharing special needs information with a male teacher. Bella tentatively understood the dynamic in relation to cultural norms and expectations around learning needs and rationalized the parent was “saving face in front of another man” (During-Placement Interview Two). The encounter highlighted an alternate perspective on how special needs information is shared and protected (i.e., such knowledge is not necessarily available for public/teacher viewing as it is in BC via IEP plans). The experience did not make Bella question her perspective that teachers should have access to such information or that parents may have concerns about sharing such information, rather it reaffirmed her sense of responsibility and commitment to supporting all students under her charge.

**Staff relations – joining the teacher tribe.** The context of working in school predominantly made of staff from two distinct cultural backgrounds, Thai and BC based Canadians, emerged as strange for Bella during the international placement. As the placement progressed, Bella increasingly understood the mix of BC and Thai national staff resulting in “interesting [social] dynamics and sometimes drama” (E-Journal Entry Three). This was further expanded upon during our conversation when Bella noted tension within the staff hierarchy, which she expressed as “conflict between the [school’s] upper management and the teachers” (During-Placement Interview Two). This was something Bella had directly experienced in BC, but more in relation to the number of years a teacher had been teaching. A hierarchy amongst staff in Thailand was also present, but it was interpreted by Bella to be a result of the greater
diversity of cultures with “so many different dynamics and different backgrounds” (During-Placement Interview Two) working within the small school context of the international placement. To me, the direct experience in Thailand exposed her general understanding of staff hierarchy in schools; one that was only made visible as a result of the new direct experience in Thailand which was deemed to be strange as elements of the direct experience did not align with Bella’s general understanding of staff hierarchy thereby disturbing her understandings.

In connection with this, Bella also noted that she developed much closer relationships with the BC teachers. She observed:

Teachers spend most time with the people from work. It was incredible how close they had become with each other and how easily they let me into their world . . . the teachers at this school are really there for each other . . . I never would have expected to make this comfortable of relationships with teachers back in BC . . . I really started to become part of the teacher tribe. (E-Journal Entry Four)

Understood as strange for Bella, the close relationship between the BC staff had a positive impact on her direct experience of the international placement, and noted it would an aspect of the experience she will remember the most. It speaks to the value that teachers place on the knowledge gained from direct experiences, as well as the importance that relationships play in the daily lives of teachers. Understandings of this new knowledge was also expressed via a direct comparison between similar experiential knowledge gained by working in relationship with other teachers in the BC based practicum. As Bella stated: “a huge part of teaching is who you work with” (E-Journal Entry Four). Interpreted from a Gadamerian perspective, close relationships with colleagues is a tradition informing understandings of good teaching and one that Bella speaks to within both the international and BC based field placements. The support
and bond Bella developed during her international placement was foundational in determining the goodness of the international placement experience.

**Bella’s Horizon of Understanding**

Overall, Bella declared the international field placement experience to be “really good . . . really nice [and] really welcoming” (Post-Placement Interview) with the only drawback being the school’s distance away from the city centre. In noting how Bella made sense of the direct experience, she regularly drew comparisons with BC experiences. In summarizing a *horizon of understanding*, as well as different understandings of good teaching, I interpreted Bella’s initial perspective of good teaching as a balance between techno-rational skills and a primary concern that students’ needs are met. At times, this perspective problematized for Bella the perceived certainty offered by a *theory-into-practice* perspective of applying propositional and procedural knowledge in attempting to meet all student needs, as was the case in meeting the needs of special needs students.

However, during our post-placement conversation, Bella reflected on the general notion of international schools, or schools operating from Western based curriculum systems within non-Western societies. Initially she framed the notion as:

> I think it’s interesting this idea of bringing Western education to other parts of the world . . . I don’t necessarily think it’s a great thing or a bad thing and I can’t really tell you why I would think it was bad or really good but I think it’s interesting. (Post-Placement Interview).

She continued by expressing the benefits of international schools in terms of “there are things about education that other countries could get from the West, and things that we can definitely learn about education from other places,” (Post-Placement Interview) but finished with
what I interpreted as a questioning of the current Western dominance in international education with “but who’s to say our way is the right way?” (Post-Placement Interview). This is a perspective that speaks to a variety of ethical concerns that interrupted Bella’s general understanding of international schooling.

In line with this, I consequently understood Bella’s direct experience of the international field placement as a fusion of horizons “whereby our [Bella’s] own horizon is enlarged and enriched” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143), in generating new understandings of international schools in general. I interpreted an interruption to Bella’s general understanding of Western schooling being used as a tool for educating the youth of a non-Western society when she questioned the general educational philosophies at play in the context of international schools, which she summarized as, “I think it’s imperialism . . . educational imperialism” (Post-Placement Interview). Thus, despite an extensive focus on techno-rational skills and propositional and procedural knowledge informing Bella’s understandings of good teaching, the post-placement conversation was “a bringing forth and a bringing to language of something new” (Moules et al., 2011, p. 3) in the form of different understandings of international education and schools. This included new understandings which speak to the larger purpose of schooling within society, and the world in general, as well as the implications of her position as a Western teacher within it. It highlighted that a Western perspective in schooling is not necessarily the only, or right way, to go about educating the next generation. I feel these different understandings became more apparent for Bella as a result of directly experiencing a Western teaching paradigm within a cultural context that is non-Western.
Concluding Comment

Overall each participant’s horizon of understanding in relation to the practice of teaching was as unique as the individuals themselves. Throughout all our conversations and e-journal submissions, strangeness was referenced over familiarity by a ratio of almost three to one, thereby highlighting the international placement’s potential to surface alternate perspectives on the practice of teaching, and a potential to generate a “type of self-knowledge that is achieved whenever we realize that something that we have thought was obvious, universal and intuitive may not have this epistemological character” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 96). For participants in my study this was the case, especially in relation to the Teaching Activities category, the most prevalent of all the categories to be referenced as strange.

In reflecting on my own interpretation of participants’ fusion of horizons, “an integration of differing perspectives in a deeper understanding of the matters in question” (Warnke, 1987, p. 169), I am struck by some of the new understandings which emerged, such as Anne’s new understandings of standardized testing as a good method for assessing student understanding, or Molly’s new understanding of the importance of building student rapport; insights at a level of complexity which I rarely hear publically expressed by pre-service teachers during on-campus coursework at my institution. It speaks to the “creative capacity [of the participants’] to interpret reality and bestow this experience [of field placement] with multiple meaning” (Britzman, 2003, p. 46). But what has also become evident, for me, is the importance of fostering an environment “where understanding shifts in ways that cause [pre-service teachers] to think about teaching and learning differently” (Thurgood-Sagal, 2007, p. 39).

In contrast with much of the teacher education literature, which highlights teacher knowledge as propositional and procedural knowledge generally assumed to be both created and
taught by members of the academy and to be applied by pre-service teachers in field placement situations (Bullock, 2011, p. 23), I saw a wealth of new knowledge informing understandings of good teaching, particularly in relation to teaching activities, the school setting and student characteristics. This is not to discount the propositional and procedural knowledge confirmed and validated by the international field placement, but it is the interruption to understandings of good teaching that also arose as a result of the direct experience of the international placement that I find particularly interesting; especially how these interruptions contributed to the participants’ understanding of what it means to be a good teacher. These are opportunities that may not have been possible within direct teaching experiences confined exclusively within a local BC based context.

While most teacher education programs, like those in BC, provide limited opportunities and encouragement for pre-service teachers to theorize about their lived experiences of teaching (Britzman, 2003), thereby marginalizing knowledge gained from direct experiences, I believe the international field placement as experienced by the six participants in this study did provide an opportunity to theorize about their lived experiences of teaching, and consequently an awareness to surface about how it is they “know what [they] know” (Britzman, 2003, p. 58) about good teaching. Notwithstanding the fact that this study provided the opportunity for the pre-service teachers to think about their practice in ways that are not always present in standard BC or international placement settings, the students’ reflection on practice was clearly precipitated by the greater freedom afforded by the international context and responsibility for independent teaching in that context. Furthermore, given that all the participants that referenced their experiences as primarily strange, as they directly engaged in the international field placement, speaks to the possibility that such placements were actually “educative experiences purposefully
embedded in meaningful pedagogical situations” (Loughran & Russell, 2007, p. 222) (i.e., situations where conflicting notions of education in particular contexts can be analyzed and tested both privately and publicly by pre-service teachers).

In short, I believe the experience mattered greatly in informing understandings of good teaching for the participants, and challenged the teacher education positing of good teaching knowledge as rigid, static, and immutable, requiring little else than compliance from the pre-service teacher (Britzman, 2003). Further, the placement contested the perspective of taking “that which does not fit with what [they] expect to find [by] assimilating the strange to the known” (Higgins, 2010, p. 322) during field placement. In conclusion, my interpretation of the study participants’ experiences of an international field placement highlighted for me the idea that the direct experience of teaching in teacher education “could be different and that action can be taken to make that difference” (Britzman, 2003, p. 53). The following chapter will elaborate on my insights gained from this study, as well as the implications these insights could have on teacher education, to potentially do things differently.
CHAPTER FIVE – FOCUSING ON THE TOPIC OF GOOD TEACHING

In addressing my overarching research question of “How might a direct experience of an international field placement at a BC Offshore School inform understandings of good teaching?” I shift my focus to the topic of good teaching. In doing so, I return to the original transcriptions of conversations and e-journal entries submitted to look for direct experiences “that conform to our expectation and confirm it [Erlebnis] and the new experiences [Erfahrung] that occur to us” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 347) in addressing the topic.

Themes of Problematization

In using Gadamer’s notion of Erfahrung to frame direct experiences in terms of an interruption to understandings of good teaching and action, that is, interruptions in which the defining quality “is not confirmation of expectations leading to trustworthy generalisations [of good teaching] but precisely disconfirmation” (Higgins, 2010, p. 323), I identified three broad themes which I theorized as problematizing understandings of good teaching: BC/Western values, “good” pedagogy, and the pre-service teacher position within the field placement. The initial portion of this chapter expands upon each of these themes in relation to Erfahrung experiences encountered during the field placements, that I, in turn, connect to the teacher education literature.

Gadamer (2004) notes that Erfahrung experiences have “a curiously productive meaning” (p. 347) in generating new insight that has the potential to alter our existing understanding by allowing us to see a “deception [of understanding] and hence make a correction” (p. 348). Thus, in relation to the three broad themes, I tried to engage in a dialogue, a genuine conversation, with the text to explore the insights generated and potential alterations to existing understandings, as well as new meanings of good teaching for participants. In short, I employed a hermeneutic
circle of meaning-making by considering the relationship of the “parts to the whole and from the whole to the parts” (Liu & Sui, 2014, p. 763). In examining the data and by reflecting on understandings and direct experiences of good teaching for my study participants, as well as for myself, it is within Gadamer’s (2004) fusion of horizons that I tried to interpret the participants’ insights and evolving conceptions. In doing so, I discovered and explored the emergence of my participants’ ethical perspectives on good teaching and subsequently outline implications for my practice in teacher education in general and for field placement in particular.

Figure 1 provides an overview of how the data leads to my interpretations. Initially, emergent categories referenced as strange by all participants were clustered in pre-, during-, and post-international field placement groups and, for organizational purposes, ranked in relation to the frequency with which they were referenced by the study participants (see bracketed numbers following each category). Additionally, the clustering of emergent categories in pre-, during-, and post-groups, directed my attention to the various transcript locations to be re-read for direct experiences that were interpreted as Erfahrung and stood in “opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350), such as that gained from on-campus teacher education coursework. However, my understanding and interpretation of the three broader themes were influenced by, but not necessarily determined by, the most frequently mentioned references; rather, they were selected because each was represented during each phase of data collection. From here, I inferred what I call three broad themes of problematization; that is, themes that provoked and challenged the participants’ underlying assumptions about teaching. Finally, these themes of problematization formed the basis from which I explored new or altered understandings of good teaching by my study participants, highlighting the emergence of ethical perspectives on good teaching. Figure 1
is presented in a linear fashion to aid the reader in understanding my reasoning, but it should be noted that the thinking process did not always unfold in such a fashion. Rather, it is cyclical and ongoing where each interpretation can “only be understood when the entire array of elements is laid out” (Decker, 2004, p. 48). My findings and interpretations are presented in the first part of this chapter.

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*Figure 1.* Schematic of my interpretation process for all references to strange throughout the study.

By broadly following the figure from left the right, I show the interpretation of my analysis for all references to “strange” throughout the study, and how this informed, via Erfahrung experiences, the development of three themes of problematization and new understandings of good teaching.
Problematizing BC/Western Values

Prior to participating in the international field placement, none of the participants explicitly predicted that their direct experience would surface greater awareness of their own BC/Western values. Rather, predictions of “strangeness” during the international placement were situated mainly within the daily activities of teaching (i.e., teaching methodology, daily teaching routine, classroom management, etc.). For example, Anne stated: “I’ll go over there and be like, whoa, we do that at home? That’s something I’m not going notice here because . . . I am always in this environment, but I might notice the differences after I come back” (Pre-Placement Focus Group). Her comments highlight an awareness that the international placement could become a new point of reference for determining difference, but the focus maintained an emphasis on propositional and procedural knowledge, consistent with the techno-rational, *theory-into-practice* paradigm of teacher education. In line with my concern for how international field placement is positioned in the literature, the experience of field placement was initially framed by Anne as an opportunity to surface differences based on propositional knowledge in the BC context versus the international context, as opposed to how the direct experience of teaching in a BC Offshore School might itself contribute to understanding good teaching. However, during- and post-placement conversations highlighted a surfacing and problematizing of the BC centric perspective. As Santoro (2009) explains, “developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge of the ‘ethnic self’ . . . is difficult and challenging work . . . [requiring] teacher educators to unsettle what are students’ [and possibly teacher educators’ as well] deeply rooted beliefs” (p. 42). I presume that this work is not commonly occurring within the study participants’ respective teacher education programs or BC based field placements.
However, in analyzing during-, and post-placement conversations, I interpreted a problematizing of the BC/Western values held by participants. Specifically, this began with the surfacing of a general sense of awareness of BC/Western centric values, and led to a sense of disconnect between those values and the local host school student context, and continued through to a questioning of the dominance and power of the BC/Western values (see boxes 1 and 2 in Figure 2).
Figure 2. Schematic of my interpretation process for the problematization of BC/Western values.

The BC Offshore School is a unique context. The school uses the BC public education curriculum and curricular resources as the key resources for schooling; however the local context in which these Western-based resources are adopted is non-Western, namely Chinese and Thai in
my study. Such a context was described by Matt using a bubble metaphor, where the BC perspective “seemingly extends across the school grounds, but is met sharply with the cultural and language barriers of the greater society [outside the host school]” (Matt, E-Journal Entry One). Such comments spoke of dichotomous thinking about the Western vs. non-Western aspects of the BC Offshore School setting, and was initially perceived as a clear boundary between Thai or Chinese and BC values.

As the international placement continued, and participants became more settled and familiar with their new teaching responsibilities and host school routines, the boundary between Western and non-Western values became increasingly contested and complex. This was particularly obvious in relation to interactions and encounters with the students of the host schools, many of whom were of non-Western heritage, or of mixed Western and Eastern heritages. For Cathy, it made problematic which cultural perspectives to follow: “You have families from all over the world with different cultures operating in a BC school in China. So it’s like what rules are you following there, like whose rules do you follow?” (Cathy, E-Journal Entry Two).

The cultural context also disrupted participants’ attempts to teach and to “cover” curriculum content, resulting in a disconnect between the different cultural perspectives of the students and the BC curriculum. For example, when using BC based resources: “one of the examples in the textbook is a fisherman on the Fraser River throwing his spear at a salmon . . . The kids in Thailand are reading this [and] some of this stuff is completely different (Matt, Post-Placement Interview). Matt began to problematize the appropriateness of using resources and content that are situated within BC centric perspectives and contexts. “All of [a] sudden, just through the tangibles in the classroom I [emphasis added] can really relate, [but] it’s completely
different for the students” (Matt, Post-Placement Interview). This quote speaks to Matt’s ability to relate, but it was problematic in that his students could not. The new understanding that emerged was the incompatibility between understandings of the nature and purpose of the school curriculum and the context of the students for whom the curriculum was intended. Thus, when Matt applied the BC curriculum in the different and unfamiliar context of the BC Offshore School, new understandings of the BC curriculum emerged.

In consequence, the direct experience of teaching a BC centric curriculum to students from different, non-BC/Western cultural and knowledge paradigms, surfaced and problematized certain taken for granted views embedded within BC/Western worldviews. Anne said, “I had to figure out ways to define words . . . words that I’ve never had to define before” and she recognized that the students had “different inherent knowledge,” or backgrounds, from which to process the BC curriculum (Anne, During-Placement Interview). During post-placement conversations, participants demonstrated increased awareness of these values, and thus I inferred that the international experience was providing opportunities to confront the Western biases and assumptions that inform the BC curriculum – and their practices. In other words, the participants problematized the embedded BC/Western values and generated a “type of self-knowledge that is achieved whenever we realize that something that we have thought was obvious, universal and intuitive may not have this epistemological character” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 96). Or as Anne also noted, the direct experience of international field placement made me question a lot of values I inherently have that I didn’t realize I had and that I’ve never questioned . . . I think these [Western] values became more obvious . . . we always think our perspective is the right perspective . . . well maybe not . . . I think I’m more aware of that now as I move forward. (Anne, Post-Placement Interview)
Although articulated as “strange,” these Erfahrung experiences surfaced disconfirmations (Higgins, 2010) for participants in relation to the BC/Western values infused within the curriculum, resources, and associated understandings of good teaching informed by BC/Western perspectives and values. The interrupting experiences “developed their awareness of options and alternatives and thus, called into question their own national culturally determined assumptions” (Driscoll & Rowe, 2012, p. 419).

Finally, by engaging in conversation with participants about the disconfirmations emerging from their Erfahrung experiences, I explored the “curiously productive meaning” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 347) of the direct experience, or the insights that emerged from our conversations. Although difficult to confirm if these insights did indeed alter teaching actions, the following comment from Bella highlights the potential fusion of horizons in how a pre-service teacher may understand and act as a teacher in the future:

I try to see things from lots of different angles but this international practicum experience definitely made me see some sides that I wouldn’t have thought of before . . . I think that will always stay with me and affect the way that I look at things in teaching. (Bella, Post-Placement Interview)

Furthermore, the fusion of horizons may also highlight the power and bias embedded within Western schooling as expressed by Anne during our post-placement conversation:

We view our values and ideals as an OK thing because we view the system that we live under as being OK, a good and a right system, but like that’s just a view we have, like who says it’s right, you know [but] we’re indoctrinating our students with these values [and] that’s something I didn’t really recognize before. (Anne, Post-Placement Interview)

As Alexander (2001) highlights, the direct experience of a comparative teaching
placement may surface how culture and pedagogy relate to and inform one another – not only in terms of how the host locale understood schooling via the BC/Western curriculum, but also how the study participants understood their practice of teaching in relation to the curriculum, and their actions as someone from a BC/Western culture and perspective. Furthermore, for all participants, the international placement was their first direct experience teaching the BC curriculum to a student body that was not part of the dominant cultural majority for which the curriculum was intended. To echo Santoro and Major (2012), the curriculum that seemed “just normal” within the BC field placement context, had become strange, or “othered” (p. 317). Thus, what was once familiar, and taken for granted had become strange, or “othered.”

Interpreted from a Gadamerian perspective, I see the direct experience of an international placement as providing an opportunity for participants to make more apparent the traditions that informed the construction of the BC curriculum and their own ideas about teaching, thereby surfacing the biases that underlie choices of goodness. Situating an international field placement in a BC Offshore School can be an opportunity for participants to consider what good teaching is without being totally overwhelmed by an entirely different setting. As Kerdem an (1998) points out, it is in being pulled “between familiarity and strangeness, we find ourselves in the middle of an on-going liminal experience, not quite at home in the world, yet not entirely estranged from it . . . that makes understanding it possible” (p. 252). Thus, for the participants, an outcome of their international placement experience and the cross-cultural context in which it took place, was “not to replace the familiar with the new, nor to encourage identification with another culture, but to de-familiarise and de-centre, so that questions can be raised about one’s own culturally-determined assumptions and about the society in which one lives” (Byram, 2008, p. 31).
Problematizing “Good” Pedagogy

Conversations during and after the international placement included over a hundred references of strangeness relating to teaching activities; conversely, pre-placement conversations predicted a great deal of familiarity in teaching activities. In a bid to make meaning of this shift from familiarity to strangeness, I interpreted that the strangeness experienced by participants as an interruption of their understandings of “good” pedagogy. This was especially evident when the host school contexts challenged the intended goals and outcomes of the participants’ planned pedagogies. For example, key pedagogies and activities referenced as strange in the context of the international field placement included: lesson planning, classroom contexts of safety, English language acquisition, building student and parental rapport, and summative testing (see box 1 in Figure 3). I interpreted the misalignments between the participants’ intended goals of “good” pedagogy and direct experiences of “good” pedagogical implementation as an interruption of general understandings of goodness. I outlined this as an interruption of the assumed universal application of “good” pedagogy and a raised awareness of alternate “good” pedagogies (see box 2 in Figure 3). Finally, I drew support for my interpretations from Driscoll and Rowe’s (2012) notion of comparative experience, and Panicucci’s (2007) stretch zone state of mind to frame how the BC Offshore School context is well suited to problematize understandings of goodness within pedagogy.
Figure 3. Schematic of my interpretation process for the problematization of “good” pedagogy.

The act of lesson planning as a whole was generally understood by all study participants as a familiar activity; however conversations during the placement and e-journal entries highlighted changes in how participants viewed the “goodness” of the lessons. Participants made extensive comparisons with previous direct experiences of planning in BC, where good planning was understood as incorporating a variety of differentiated teaching strategies, accommodations, designations, and an emphasis on classroom management. For some participants, the direct experience of planning for the BC Offshore School context increased their awareness of, and appreciation for, the processes they used in BC, especially in relation to lesson planning thoroughness and expectations. However, a key interruption in understandings of good lessons was articulated in relation to planning for a class where student focus and commitment to classroom work was homogenous, that is, where “students all had the same [lesson] expectations . . . and [worked] all at the same level” (Cathy, Post-Placement Interview).

Interruptions to the participants’ ideas of good lesson planning were noted when the intended “goodness” of the teaching activities did not align with the intended outcomes. For example, in planning a math lesson involving the use of modeling clay, an interactive teaching method was judged to be good by Molly because the students were “going to play and be kids”
(Molly, Post-Placement Interview) while learning math. However, after reflecting on the direct experience of the lesson, Molly described a completely different student response to the one that she had expected:

Half of the class didn’t want to touch the modeling clay because it was dirty . . . and the other half wanted to make perfect symmetrical 3D shapes out of it. . . . They didn’t all hate the clay, but they all weren’t super stoked on the play dough whereas I know if I had done that in BC, it would have been like ‘awesome’ and the students would have learned a lot from it whereas the kids in China didn’t really take a lot away from it. (Molly, Post-Placement Interview)

The direct experience problematized Molly’s judgement of good teaching embedded within lesson planning where interactive learning, a key tenet of a Western approach to teaching and learning, is indicative of good lesson planning. By engaging in the direct experience of teaching in an unfamiliar context where interactive learning was not necessarily the norm, Molly’s prejudices were challenged.

Another example of problematizing the notion of what is understood to be “good” in a particular teaching context was safety in PE. In contending with an unsafe space for teaching PE, Molly and Cathy, who both taught PE at the same host school, initially judged the teaching environment as “not good” due to the potential for student injury. However, as the international placement continued I interpreted a shift in their initial judgements – judgements made on the general understanding that for a PE lesson to be good it must be void of potential safety hazards: “Immediately my mind went to the safety concern . . . but then I saw it wasn’t as bad . . . the kids were really good and there were no injuries . . . the teachers were just dealing with what they had” (Cathy, Post-Placement Interview). As the international placement continued, I interpreted
a small shift in the conclusive notion that “good” PE teaching pedagogy could only take place in environments void of dangers. Instead, what became apparent to me was that the international field placement allowed Molly and Cathy to experience, or know, that what might be construed in a BC context as an “unsafe” PE environment allowed students in the international field placement context to learn about self-awareness, caution, and resiliency while the overall emphasis on safety (the “goodness”) in BC was consequently understood as “we cushion kids way too much in BC” (Cathy, E-Journal Entry One). Thus, I interpreted the direct experience of teaching PE in China as an opportunity for reflection and problematization of their notions of what constituted good teaching. The event highlighted that what was determined to be “good” in BC could be seen differently from another perspective and allow for alternate outcomes of “good” for the students involved. In reflecting on the experience, I am left wondering what kind of role this perspective could play in how we conduct physical activities in BC, but I will leave that for further consideration at another time.

For other participants, the way English language was promoted and enforced within the international field placement context was another encounter to be referenced as strange within the BC Offshore School contexts. The use of “English only zone” signs and positive reinforcement via extrinsic motivators such as prizes and stickers, etc. was seen as strange: “In the first week I was sitting at the back of the class watching my sponsor teacher teach and the posters were right up there in front of the class . . . I remember seeing that and right away it hit me: That’s strange” (Cathy, Post-Placement Interview). For Cathy, this approach was in tension with the values of promoting diversity, thus viewed as disrespectful and not good. This was a conclusion reached when the direct experience was compared with how French was encouraged and promoted in BC, where students “wouldn’t be penalized for speaking English [in French
Encouraging the use of English via an external reward system was questioned by Bella as “you can’t really shove English down students’ throats . . . and it was strange that some of the teachers were really, really adamant about students only speaking English in the school . . . They’re Thai students with a Thai culture and a Thai identity” (Bella, Post-Placement Interview). This speaks to a tension in trying to contend with both English language promotional techniques and personal values held in relation to respect for individual differences. Although not explicitly stated by either Cathy or Bella, the experience of English language promotion techniques surfaced traditions and values which inform determinations of good teaching, in this instance, language instruction.

However, as the international placement continued, and participants worked in relationship with students trying to become proficient English speakers while also trying to learn curriculum concepts in their native languages, participants’ initial judgements about various English promotion techniques began to shift. Eventually new understandings emerged, and the overall goodness of the techniques was recognized as helping “students work on annunciation and verbal proficiency” (Anne, E-Journal Entry Two) and was situated within comprehension and “checks for understanding” (Post-Placement Focus Group), which were ultimately deemed a “positive thing in that context” (Cathy, Post-Placement Interview).

Another example of difference interpreted as strange in relation to “good” pedagogy was the building of rapport with students. When Molly applied various pedagogies to achieve this outcome within the context of the international placement, she found the results surprising:

Students in China didn’t want to build a rapport in the same way, with jokes and humour, that the kids in BC do . . . it never really felt like they cared about me in the same way as my BC kids did [who] wanted to give me hugs before I left . . . I could tell they genuinely
really cared about me but in China I don’t think we every really got to that level . . . [it] always felt a little guarded, or at least I picked up on that. (Molly, Post-Placement Interview)

I interpreted the notion of teacher-student relationship as understood within the BC context to be based around ideals of friendship, while in China students maintained a greater distance in terms of personal engagement (perhaps out of respect) for the teacher. “You are the authoritative person in the classroom . . . It was very much ‘We respect her, she is the teacher and that’s the way we treat her.’ She’s not a friend and I think that is where I found the difference” (Molly, Post-Placement Interview).

This understanding was based on a comparison between previous direct experiences of building rapport in BC based field placements and led to a problematizing of pedagogies used to build student rapport. It also problematized a general understanding and judgement that infusing humour into teaching is “good” pedagogy. For Molly, this interruption in understanding occurred in the China context and challenged her assumption that “being yourself” is a good pedagogy for building rapport: “In being myself and bringing out my personality into the class I really like to joke around with my students . . . that’s how I build a rapport with the students [in BC] but in China the students just didn’t get the jokes in the same way . . .” (Molly, Post-Placement Interview).

In a similar vein, building parent-teacher relationships was also problematized for Susan. In an attempt to build community within the classroom, she invited parents to come and watch the students make presentations in relation to their personal interests and passions. Based on previous direct experiences in BC, hosting a parent party was understood to be “good” pedagogy since it allowed for parents to connect and build relationships with one another and the teacher.
However, when this approach was applied within the unfamiliar context of the international placement, it became evident that the expectation that parents are interested in building a sense of school community was not necessarily true: “I thought the parents would talk to each other more in the classroom and they didn’t really. So it was kind of awkward” (Susan, Post-Placement Interview). I interpreted the direct experience as not reversing an understanding of “good” to “bad,” rather, it highlighted an alternate perspective on how a “good” pedagogy may be perceived by the intended audience – as well as questioning Susan’s certainty of a “good” pedagogy.

Finally, the use of summative tests, particularly tests designed to assess understanding of curriculum content via a unit test, is another example of a “good” pedagogy which was directly experienced as strange during the international placement. For Anne, and based on her own direct experiences of summative testing as a high school student, such assessment was initially understood to be “good” pedagogy to determine levels of student knowledge of the curriculum. However, upon directly experiencing summative testing in the BC Offshore School context, notions of goodness within this pedagogy were problematized, and led to a shift in determining the goodness of such an assessment strategy in a senior level class:

For the most part my students were getting the content and then they wrote a standardized [multiple choice] unit test. My class average was 30 percent and some students got 15 percent. I was sitting there looking at them and thinking these students know way more than 25 percent of the information on this test . . . So then I’m, like, okay, what is this testing because this clearly is not a good representation of what my students know. . . . The results did not represent what they know in the slightest! So then I’m like what was the point of that then? . . . The experience totally completely changed my opinion of
multiple choice tests and testing students in that way. It made me mad. (Anne, During-Placement Interview Two)

I interpreted this direct experience as a significant interruption for Anne, or Erfahrung. Through the application of a familiar “good” pedagogy in assessment within a student context that was composed of a different set of contextual factors, the direct experience highlighted for Anne that this “good” testing pedagogy was in fact not very good. However, I also saw new meanings arise, in that multiple choice tests were now understood as a poor representation of student knowledge. Anne questioned the application of the pedagogy, and further noted a shift in her actions as a teacher in response to the new knowledge gained from her experience. Anne stated:

I’m trying to do a lot more [assessment] with open-ended written questions. So instead of [assessing for] these little snippets of knowledge, those stupid little facts, I ask more broad questions where students can pull in different types of knowledge . . . [and connect] with broader concepts. (Anne, During Practicum Interview Two)

In summary, the direct experiences of international placement situated within a BC Offshore School provided participants with a comparative experience from which to conceive of different perspectives around understandings and applications of “good” pedagogy that may not have been possible within the context of a BC based field placement. As Alexander (2001) states: “Without comparison we simply refashion the world to fit our individual, collective or political interests and remain imprisoned by local or national habits that are too deeply ingrained to allow us to countenance alternatives” (p. 49), or in Gadamerian language, Erlebnis experiences that “conform to our expectation and confirm it” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 347). Thus, the new experience provided deeper insights into their own personal values for some participants.
around “good” pedagogy, while for others the direct experience highlighted taken for granted understandings and norms of “good” pedagogy, or, in Gadamerian language, an Erfahrung experience – a finding that is supported by international field placement literature (Driscoll & Rowe, 2012; Mahan & Stachowski, 1992; Maynes et al., 2012; Newman, Taylor, Whitehead, & Planel, 2004). Or as Brindley et al.’s (2009) study noted, perhaps it was the time away from the everyday hectic lives of teacher education that allowed the study participants time “to stop and reflect on teaching and learning,” coupled with “being out of their comfort zone caused them some dissonance and required [that] they were open-minded in order to make sense of the experience” (p. 531). As Bella noted, “I think I learned that my assumptions were questioned. I was able to see subject matter in a fresh way and then develop new thinking” (Post-Placement Focus Group).

Such a finding is consistent with Santoro and Major’s (2012) work that suggests that “dissonance or disequilibrium is an important precursor to learning” and in summarizing Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance, “when we are presented with information, events and ideas that are in conflict with our existing knowledge and expectations, we are challenged to think differently” (Santoro & Major, 2012, p. 311). In drawing from outdoor education theory, I could interpret the experience as a “stretch zone” experience, the middle of three zones, “a place where interest is piqued, our senses are enlived, and there is some disequilibrium” (Panicucci, 2007, p. 38). That is, the experience is beyond the BC based comfort zone, but not as far as a panic zone where “stress is so high that information cannot be integrated” (Panicucci, 2007, p. 39). Interpreted from a Gadamerian perspective, the purpose was “not to replace the familiar with the new, nor to encourage identification with another culture, but to de-familiarise and de-centre, so that questions can be raised about one’s own culturally-determined assumptions and about the
society in which one lives” (Byram, 2008, p. 31). Informed by this perspective, I interpreted that this is what is occurring when the pre-service teachers reconsidered their notions of “good” pedagogy as described above.

My finding contrasts with reports from colleagues who took pre-service teachers to placements in places such as Ghana and Belize; these international field placements were more focused on coping with the day-to-day non-schooling experiences of dissonance, such as contending with teaching students living in abject poverty with little access to daily survival needs, leading to dissonance that “may have been too great and too unsettling to promote . . . learning” (Santoro & Major, 2012, p. 319). I am not claiming such direct experiences are void of opportunities for interruptions to understandings of schooling, but the conversations I had with my study participants highlighted that a BC Offshore School experience may provide enough day-to-day familiarity in relation to technical rational skills and their previous experiences that participants were able to ponder the embedded understandings of “good” pedagogy within their teaching practice, the curriculum taught, and the resources used to support that teaching. As Anne stated: “I can say ‘I taught’ in China, but I really feel as though I was the one being taught and learning more than I could have imagined” (Anne, E-Journal Entry Four).

Problematizing the Pre-Service Teacher Position within the Field Placement

One experience of the international field placement to be referenced as strange for all participants was the lack of direct field supervision. This was an expected interruption as participants were aware of the altered supervision framework for the international field placement, which consisted of a half-time teaching load and no supervision by a university associate. In this context the host schools’ vice-principal took on the supervisory position, but this did not include evaluation/assessment as part of that role. This interruption was predicted to
be, and then directly experienced as, strange (see box 1 in Figure 4) for participants. Conversely, the position of being a pre-service teacher was also understood to be familiar, especially in relation to working with sponsor teachers and adjusting to a new teaching context (see box 1 in Figure 4). However, based on the elements of strangeness directly experienced during the international placement (i.e., within the field placement) and reflected upon post-placement, a number of interruptions emerged for all participants in relation to this element, many of which I interpreted as giving rise to increased feelings of confidence in teaching, and understandings of good teaching thereby problematizing the conception of good teaching as being primarily an application of theory taught by university faculty. I draw upon the practice-and-theory notion by Russell et al. (2013) to outline how the international field placement was an opportunity for participants to learn and gain new knowledge from their direct experiences of teaching, and not necessarily from supervisory feedback on that experience (see box 3 in Figure 4).
Figure 4. Schematic of my interpretation process for the problematization of the applied theory model of teacher education.

The altered supervision and teaching expectation of the international field placement was a key topic of conversation during the pre-placement focus group. The arrangements were predicted to be different from the BC based placement, but understood to be positive and more carefree: “We’re only teaching half days . . . totally different stresses of being a student-teacher, it will be easy peasy!” (Pre-Placement Focus Group).

During the international placement, the absence of direct supervision continued to emerge as strange, and predominantly understood as a positive aspect of the international field
placement. Determinations of strangeness were consistently made in comparison to previous direct experiences of the BC based field placements:

In my BC practicum I found it kind of sluggish . . . there were things that I wanted to do that I just didn’t feel comfortable doing or just supervision circumstances just wouldn’t allow it, . . . [while in Thailand] I’ve been able to kind of, you know, make more progress towards who I think I am as an educator. (Matt, During-Placement Interview Two)

Overall, the altered supervision set-up within the field placement led to feelings of confidence for all participants. By removing a key direct link to the propositional and procedural knowledge of the academy – knowledge that is assessed by “expert” field supervisors when applied in the field – I interpreted an increased reliance on, and trust in, the understanding gained from the direct experience of teaching, and in developing an understanding of good teaching. This was a sentiment articulated by Bella as: “I am free to develop my teaching style” (Bella, E-Journal Entry One) and by Anne with:

Because I’m not being evaluated every day like in BC, because I’m not stressed out about these little things [like being evaluated], I’m way more myself in front of the class and I’m having way more fun. I feel like because of that I’m having a lot more success in my classes too. (Anne, During-Placement Interview Two)

For Susan, the lack of direct supervision initially evoked a sense of discomfort: “I’m not being assessed [in Thailand] so the sponsor teacher keeps saying “just try things out.” But that’s what the supervisor in Canada said, so it’s not that I feel I can’t try more things, I just feel I get less feedback” (Susan, During-Placement Interview One). However, by not having a supervisor provide feedback, Susan noted: “I’m trying to get on myself . . . judging myself in that [supervisor] kind of way” (Susan, During-Placement Interview One). Thus, shifting the
supervision and evaluation structure provided an opportunity for pre-service teachers to develop and rely upon their own understandings gained from the direct experiences of teaching in order to make judgements of practice and goodness in teaching.

Some additional understandings to emerge during post-placement conversations with participants that expanded on similar themes raised in during-placement conversations included:

Yeah, just more relaxed. In BC it’s like you’re constantly having your driver’s test whereas when you’re driving on your own, you’re a better driver. You’re a way better driver when someone’s not watching you all the time. (Post-Placement Focus Group)

I felt like I was able to do what I felt like doing and just seeing how it went, seeing what happens . . . to experience trying something whether it succeeds or whether it fails. Whereas in the BC practicum, it was kind of like if it fails then I will have a report written on it . . . I didn’t want to sit down in a three-way conference with somebody defending why I did an activity a certain way. I wanted to run through the experience myself. (Matt, Post-Placement Interview)

In China, it was almost like my teaching was a bit different because I knew I was not being watched . . . In BC, I got all nervous and my personality changed a little bit when my supervisor was watching me teach. (Cathy, Post-Placement Interview)

I always felt like my BC sponsor teacher was telling me things. And it was, like, yeah, I know but you don’t need to treat me like a child or just say things that I just had to take it . . . But in China, they treated you more like a teacher already. (Cathy Post-Placement Interview)

It was more like being a teacher, an unpaid teacher rather than a student-teacher, but I think it was good because all of a sudden I was totally responsible for all of this stuff I
should be doing [which] I shouldn’t just be I’m doing it because someone [e.g., a field supervisor] is telling me I have to do it. (Susan, Post-Placement Interview)

For China you didn’t have a supervisor . . . like you weren’t being essentially graded on so that was something I didn’t have to focus on. I could focus on me. (Molly, Post-Placement Interview)

Overall, many of the sentiments raised by my study participants are consistent with literature around international field placement, (Kabilan, 2013; Myers, 1997; Parr & Chan, 2015; Santoro & Major, 2012; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007) in that a direct experience of teaching within an international field placement context fostered an increased sense of confidence in teaching practice, especially in regard to practical skills, practical knowledge, and personal growth.

However, in understanding how participants arrived at their understanding, Gadamer (2004) provides important resources for interpretation, and a framework from which to make meaning of the direct experience of being positioned as a pre-service teacher during an international placement as illustrated above. Further, summarizing Kerdeman’s (1998) perspectives of hermeneutics and education, I concur with her notion that all education, including teacher education, is education for self-understanding (p. 255). She explains:

It is through experiencing ambiguity and doubt, rather than by means of formal or detached analysis, that life’s meaning and purpose is understood . . . to understand better the tensions in our human situation [as teachers] . . . self-understanding is clarified [which] may involve creating or seizing opportunities that question and even refute [pre-service teachers’] expectations. (Kerdeman, 1998, pp. 255-256)
From this perspective, I interpreted the study participants’ understandings of what it means to be a pre-service teacher within the context of an international field placement as an increased understanding of self-as-teacher.

In sum, the international field placement context of a BC Offshore School – imbued with familiarity and strangeness – can be an opportunity characterized by ambiguity, doubt and uncertainty; however, the absence of direct faculty based supervision can also support the development of new understandings of teaching from the pre-service teachers’ perspectives. Such an experience can problematize the dominant theory-into-practice conceptualization of teacher education and field placement “so implicit in most programs that we tend to be unaware of it and thus fail to critique it” (Russell et al., 2013, p. 11). In contrast, I interpreted the direct experience of the international field placement to highlight a practice-and-theory perspective which recognizes, to paraphrase Russell et al. (2013), that theory cannot be fully understood without teaching experience: Pre-service teachers can and must think for themselves; they must learn to critique their practices themselves (p. 16). In turn, this problematizes the notion that the critiquing of good teaching within the field placement is under the purview of the academy (i.e., university field supervisors).

Limiting formal evaluation and the micromanagement of pre-service teachers during field placement provided an opportunity for study participants to engage with tensions of familiarity and strangeness in circumstances where they had to develop their own resources and capacities to contend with whatever arose. They began to challenge their own practices: “Understanding partakes of familiarity and difference, so learning [to teach] depends not only on preconceptions, but also on openness and questioning” (Kerdeman, 1998, p. 247). In my study, this opportunity was fostered in an international field placement, uniquely situated within a blend of familiarity
and strangeness, where dialogue focused on the topic of good teaching and was actively pursued. The international placement became an opportunity for participants to learn from their individual direct experiences, as varied and sometimes unstructured as they were. This problematized the conception of good teaching as being primarily an application of theory taught by, and subsequently monitored and critiqued by, university faculty (i.e., experts).

**Altered Understandings and Insights of Good Teaching**

In reflecting on my own efforts to engage with the understandings of good teaching for six pre-service teachers participating in an international field placement, I return to Gadamer’s (2004) notion of *fusion of horizons* which frames understanding as essentially/inherently historically affected, limited, and finite, but as “essentially open . . . a fusion whereby our own horizon is enlarged and enriched” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 143). Considering the insights of good teaching to arise from my participants’ experiences, I was struck, for example, by the ethical concerns that they raised after their international field placements. Statements such as “Good teaching is understanding the background of the students . . . to try and see the world from [their] perspective . . . and seeing kids as individual people who come from different places . . . different feelings” (Bella, Post-Placement Interview) or “The ways in which you chose to approach that mountain of good teaching [are] infinite . . . I have a clearer sense [of it] . . . because of the international practicum” (Matt, Post-Placement Interview) seem to speak to this. My participants developed new understandings of good teaching.

Indeed, I have evidence that my six participants enlarged and enriched their horizons of good teaching by problematizing the hegemony of Western values in BC schooling, by expanding and modifying their ideas about good pedagogy and by challenging the applied theory of teacher education. Their intellectual journey, however, was not a simple progression from
ignorance to enlightenment, or from question to answer; instead, they attended to new understandings – and returned to think and reconstruct those understandings again. Generals and particulars informed one another in hermeneutic circles, that is, “structure[s] of understanding within the framework of a formal relation between part and whole . . . that [are] constantly augmented by new information” (Kinsella, 2006, p. 4), a process that can be “both vicious and productive . . . [and] may spiral outward in breadth” (Higgins, 2010, p. 303). Thus, it is in relating parts (particular experiences) to wholes (general understandings) and vice versa, that the participants constructed their understanding of good teaching. Neither the whole nor the parts existed in isolation: Understanding exists between the interplay of general understanding (what is familiar) and that which interrupts that understanding (what is strange). I summarize this process of understanding good teaching emerging from the experience of international field placement in this project in Figure 5.

The figure represents my conception of how pre-service teachers came to their understandings of good teaching in the direct experience of an international field placement. I note that while their goal may be a fusion of horizons, genuine conversation is at the centre of my diagram since it is in language that something is allowed to emerge and “henceforth exists” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 385). The circular process of this conversation is represented by the arrows moving in both directions.
Figure 5. My understanding of good teaching and international field placement in teacher education.
**Implications: The Role of Experience in Teacher Education**

As someone involved with international field placement and with knowledge of the students, schools, and geographical locations that comprise my own practice of international teaching, this research has encouraged me to believe that international field placement can be a worthwhile pursuit. As a result of this project, I now understand that my educational responsibility extends well beyond my previous roles as primary contact, promoter, pre-service teacher recruiter, and chief organizer. If I hope to be an authentic teacher educator, my obligations include finding or creating the right opportunities for students to have educational experiences and ensuring that the requisite supports for pre-service teachers to actually benefit from these experiences are in place.

My study argues for the value of international field placements where pre-service teachers will be able to surface the biases and traditions that inform their taken for granted BC/Western conceptions of good teaching, as well as reflect on and challenge these fundamental understandings. In short, I am seeking to promote Erfahrung, that is, direct experiences that disturb what has become familiar, a goal that is consistent with my understanding of hermeneutical interpretation, which “is stimulated by difference and distance. As a consequence of encountering difference, the familiar is transformed; the ‘other’ also undergoes change in the dialectic of understanding” (Kerdeman, 1998, p. 246).

My study therefore raises an important question of how much to disturb? For example, how far from BC? Why China? Why Thailand? Why BC Offshore Schools and not International Baccalaureate schools? How much strangeness is too much? How much familiarity it too much? For example, some colleagues have raised the question of whether
China and Thailand are “international enough” to be suitable locales for international field placement.

In response, I contend that the practice of placing pre-service teachers in international field placements at BC Offshore Schools does not aim at creating a context that results in “more” internationalized or globalized teachers, but rather a space for reflective, intimate, and personal thinking around what the possibilities might be for the practice of teaching and understanding the goodness within it. Consequently, I contend that the quasi-familiar context of a BC Offshore School setting provided my study participants with a “stretch zone” – a setting that provides rich potential to surface prejudices informing understandings of good teaching and to interrupt these understandings. Panicucci (2007) explains that “personal growth [does] not occur if there is no disequilibrium in a person’s current thinking or feeling [and] learning will shut down if that disequilibrium gets so high that person enters the panic zone” (p. 39). Indeed, returning to my explication of Gadamerian ideas of experience, no event is entirely Erlebnis or Erfahrung, but contains elements of familiarity and incongruity: the educational challenge is to find environments that encourage challenging the familiar without being overpowered by what seems incomprehensible. I am not, of course, claiming that one needs to leave Canada to find environments that challenge the taken for granted, but I do contend that BC Offshore Schools provide opportunities for Erlebnis and Erfahrung.

Taking advantage of such opportunities, however, requires substantial support. Simply requiring international field placements of pre-service teachers is unlikely to fuse any educational horizons. However, given that hermeneutical understanding requires being open to and engaging with new experiences, much of my study is built on scaffolds of dialogic support for participants: I interviewed each participant four times, talked with them in focus groups pre-
and post-international placements and responded to their bi-weekly e-journal reflections – all in
efforts to promote genuine conversations around their understandings, interpretations, and
actions of good teaching. Partly in response to Britzman’s (2003) concern that “student teachers
rarely have the space and official encouragement to consistently theorize about their lived
experience” (p. 64), the notion of genuine conversations serves as an important starting point.
Matt explains:

It’s messy to think about these things [and] we don’t have a lot of these conversations,
even in an education program. I don’t think I’ve ever really expressed connections
between my classroom set-up, thoughtfulness and good teaching to anyone and I don’t
think I’ve heard anyone talk like that . . . you don’t get [the opportunity] to really kind of
go with why you are here [in the program] and why you want to teach. That’s a tough
thing and I don’t know how you fix that. (Matt, Post-Placement Interview)

Engaging in genuine conversation helped us (the pre-service teachers and myself) to
surface new understandings about good teaching and not simply the international field
placement. This concern for “conversation” has had important implications for my practice as a
teacher educator; as Figure 5 outlines, this genuine conversation is the axis around which my
practice rotates. While I tried to attend to the requirements of Gadamerian dialogue (e.g.,
focusing on the truth between us, being completely open to the other, believing and doubting) in
an effort to fuse horizons or come to a genuine understanding between us, I did not focus on the
character or quality of our dialogue (a topic for future research).

Ironically, while our efforts to connect dialogically brought us together, moving the field
placement component of teacher education to an international setting provided unexpected
autonomy for the participants from institutional structures. As a consequence of the BC Offshore
School setting, participants had greater freedom to reflect more explicitly and openly on teaching activities, the student dynamic, and on classroom and school staff relations in ways that may not have occurred or may have gone unnoticed or been dismissed in regular BC based field placements. Participants regularly commented on their opportunities to think about teaching in new ways given the reduction in their teaching time and independence from direct supervision. For example, Matt noted “when you take away the paper assessment forms, the expectations, the supervision – all that stuff, then you can just really kinda run free with what you think who you want to be as an educator. That was tremendously valuable and really kind of felt free; liberating!” (Matt, Post-Placement Interview). Or in Cathy’s case, the ability to reflect on her views of student-centered teaching: “I think I gained a new sense of appreciation for the student-centred approach…In BC I was so resistant to what the instructors were teaching…but in China, because there was more teacher-directed teaching, I was like OK, I get it now” (Cathy, Post-Placement Interview) or in Anne’s reflection on curriculum and education as a whole:

Before the China placement, my supervisor made me link all my lesson outcomes with [BC curriculum] and I just took our [BC] curriculum as like this is good and this is good education. And now I’m kind of like… I still believe that we have a very good education system and I still believe the curriculum is good but I don’t think that everything should be taken at such face value. (Anne, Post-Placement Interview).

Independence from school bureaucracy contributed to participants’ intellectual autonomy as well. The distance from Canada helped them begin to understand the hegemony of Western schooling and start to look to their own experience in new cultures with different ways of understanding schooling and education. Indeed, the intellectual resources provided by their formal education – e.g., the propositional and procedural knowledge of teaching – clearly did not
“fit” the students in front of them, such as Molly’s interactive math lesson using modeling clay or Susan’s parent party to build classroom community. In consequence, this contributed to their search for new resources in understanding good teaching. My study provides evidence that the autonomy characteristic of some international field placements can provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to problematize their understandings of teaching, to consider what constitutes good teaching, and to engage with broader concepts such as the purpose of education, curriculum, and the notion of internationalization.

Finally, I see the purpose and focus of my practice as a teacher educator in relation to international field placement, and to teacher education as a whole, as one that understands learning to teach as embedded in “the lived lives of teachers, in the values, beliefs, and deep convictions enacted in practice, in the social context that encloses such practice, and in the social relationships that enliven the teaching and learning encounter” (Britzman, 2003, pp. 64-65). My educational goal for international field placement is not to find “the answer” to “best practice” teaching. Rather, my aim is focused on the task of striving “to understand ourselves and our human situation clearly and fully as we try to construe meaning in experiences and situations of which we are a part” (Kerdeman, 1998, p. 252), a goal that is congruent with a hermeneutical approach to research. Indeed, as Shaun Gallagher explains (cited in Kerdemann, 1998), “Educational experience is always hermeneutical experience” (p. 247). It is from this perspective that I understand and endeavour to proceed in my practice as a teacher educator.
References


Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Marian Riedel and I am currently an Ed.D. student in Educational Leadership and Policy at UBC. I am in my third year of study in the Department of Educational Studies and working on my thesis. Professor Anthony Clarke is my Supervisor/Principle Investigator and I am the Co-Investigator.

The purpose of this study is to explore understandings of teaching and education, and subsequent judgements of “good” as understood by pre-service teachers participating in an international field placement at a BC Offshore School. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are participating in the International Practicum Placement program in May 2014. We want to learn more about how pre-service teachers arrive at their understandings of teaching and learning, and how an international field placement experience may provide new or different understandings of teaching and education. This study will also help us learn more about international field placement at BC Offshore Schools, and how such an experience contributes to initial teacher education at the Faculty of Education at VIU. Thus, we are inviting people like you; individuals who have chosen to participate in the International Practicum Placement program to help us.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to commit approximately 5.5 hours of time over an 8 week period. I have provided a detailed handout containing the details, including dates for data collection and approximate time commitments for each step. Generally speaking, however, the will proceed as follows:

We will ask you about your understandings of teaching and education, and how you decide what constitutes “good” during an individual interview and focus group interview prior to your departure for your international field placement. These interviews will be audio recorded.

During your international field placement you will be asked to write one journal entry per week via email focusing on aspects of your placement, particularly that of your school and teaching, which you have found to be familiar, and those which you found to be unfamiliar. In support of these observations, you will be asked to collect artifacts relating to your experiences of familiarity and unfamiliarity, such as a school timetable set up, lesson plans used, a classroom seating arrangement, etc. to support your journal entries. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in two brief remote individual interviews via Skype to expand upon your observations of familiarity and unfamiliarity. These interviews will be audio recorded.

Upon completion of your international field placement, you will once again be asked to participate in one individual interview and one focus group interview focusing on how your understandings of teaching and education, and subsequent judgments of good may have changed. These interviews will be audio recorded.

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate doctoral thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. Should you wish to receive an email notification upon the completion of this study, you can leave a contact email on the Consent Form.

In terms of risk, we do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. Some of the questions we ask, however, may seem sensitive or personal, or some might upset you. Should such an incident arise, you are in no way obligated to answer any such questions if you do not want to and please let one of the study staff know if you have any concerns.
Rather, in conversation with others and journal reflections, we hope your participation will benefit you with a deeper understanding of an international field placement, and how such an experience may inform your understandings of “good” teaching and education.

Throughout this study, your confidentiality will be respected and participation in this study will not be disclosed to your host BC Offshore School, your current Field Experience Supervisor and VIU Faculty instructors, or host school Sponsor Teachers and Supervisors. All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential, with only the above Study Team members having access to the raw data collected during this study. Data will be stored on a password protected and encrypted personal computer. Data will be destroyed after five years and will be housed securely at UBC in the interim. However, please note that this study can only offer limited confidentiality due to the small number of total participants and the focus group data collection method. While we encourage participants not to discuss the content of the focus group to people outside the group; we cannot control what participants do with the information discussed. Finally, there is a small risk your participation may be recognized to people outside of this study due to the limited number of pre-service teachers participating in the International Practicum Placement program at VIU. However, efforts to limit this risk include the use of code names for participants and referring to BC Offshore host schools by country instead of by specific name and by withholding possible identifying details.

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your class standing at VIU, initial teacher education program completion, final field experience placement with the program and future references provided by the Faculty of Education at VIU.

Should you decide to participate, I would like to have the Consent Form returned by ____________ in room ________. If you would like to speak with me privately about your potential participation, I would be more than happy to discuss the details at your earliest convenience in my office.

Thank you for your time.
Appendix B

Consent Form

I. STUDY TEAM

Principal Investigator: Dr. Anthony Clarke, UBC, Faculty of Education
telephone: xxx-xxx-xxxx
email: xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx

Co-Investigator: Ms. Marian Riedel, VIU, Faculty of Education
telephone: xxx-xxx-xxxx
email: xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx

This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral thesis. The results of this study will be reported in a written thesis paper and in an oral defense in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership and Policy in the Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education at UBC.

II. INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore understandings of teaching and education, and subsequent judgements of “good” as understood by pre-service teachers participating in an international field placement at a BC Offshore School. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are participating in the International Practicum Placement program in May 2014. We want to learn more about how pre-service teachers arrive at their understandings of teaching and learning, and how an international field placement experience may provide new or different understandings of teaching and education. This study will also help us learn more about international field placement at BC Offshore Schools, and how such an experience contributes to initial teacher education at the Faculty of Education at VIU. Thus, we are inviting people like you; individuals who have chosen to participate in the International Practicum Placement program to help us.

III. STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to commit approximately 5.5 hours of time over an 8 week period. Below is an outline of how the study will proceed:

We will ask you about your understandings of teaching and education, and how you decide what constitutes “good” during an individual interview and focus group interview prior to your departure for your international field placement. These interviews will be audio recorded.

During your international field placement you will be asked to write one journal entry per week via email focusing on aspects of your placement, particularly that of your school and teaching, which you have found to be familiar, and those which you found to be unfamiliar. In support of these observations, you will be asked to collect artifacts relating to your experiences of familiarity and unfamiliarity, such as a school timetable set up, lesson plans used, a classroom seating arrangement, etc. to support your journal entries. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in two brief remote individual interviews via Skype to expand upon your observations of familiarity and unfamiliarity. These interviews will be audio recorded.
Upon completion of your international field placement, you will once again be asked to participate in one individual interview and one focus group interview focusing on how your understandings of teaching and education, and subsequent judgements of good may have changed. These interviews will be audio recorded.

IV. STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate doctoral thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. Should you wish to receive an email notification upon the completion of this study and the publication of the thesis, please provide an email address below.

V. POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. Some of the questions we ask, however, may seem sensitive or personal, or some might upset you. Should such an incident arise, you are in no way obligated to answer any such questions if you do not want to and please let one of the study staff know if you have any concerns.

VI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Through conversation with others and reflections in journals, we hope your participation will benefit you with a deeper understanding of your experiences in an international field placement, and how such an experience may inform your understandings of “good” teaching and education.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

Your confidentiality will be respected and participation in this study will not be disclosed to your host BC Offshore School, your current Field Experience Supervisor and VIU Faculty instructors. All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential, with only the above Study Team members having access to the raw data collected during this study. Data will be stored on a password protected and encrypted personal computer. Data will be destroyed after five years and will be housed securely at UBC in the interim. However, please note that this study can only offer limited confidentiality due to the small number of total participants and the focus group interview data collection method. While we encourage participants not to discuss the content of the focus group interviews to people outside the group; we can not control what participants do with the information discussed. Finally, there is a small risk your participation may be recognized to people outside of this study due to the limited number of pre-service teachers participating in the International Practicum Placement program at VIU. However, efforts to limit this risk include the use of code names for participants and referring to BC Offshore host schools by country instead of by specific name and by withholding possible identifying details in final reports.

VIII. CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Anthony Clarke, or the Co-Investigator Ms Marian Riedel at VIU. The names and contact details are listed at the top of the first page of this form.
IX. CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS
If you have any concerns about your rights as a research subject and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at xxx-xxx-xxxx or if long distance e-mail xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx or call toll free x- xxx-xxx-xxxx.

X. PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE
Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your class standing at VIU, initial teacher education program completion, final field experience placement with the program and future references provided by the Faculty of Education at VIU.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

If you wish to participate, please return this signed Consent Form within one week to Marian Riedel, in office xxx, building xxx at Vancouver Island University.

__________________________________
Participant Signature

__________________________________
Date

__________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant signing above

__________________________________
Optional Email Address (for notification of study completion)
Appendix C

Pre-Placement Interview Questions

A) Warm Up/Get to Know You Questions:

1. In which teacher education program are you currently enrolled in?

2. For your international field placement you will be going to school _____________, in the country ________________. Is that correct?

3. You have recently completed your BC based spring practicum. Could you describe this practicum? For example, in which school, what grade or subjects did you teach, etc.?

4. How do you feel your last practicum went? Are there any particular high points and/or low points you could share?

5. In terms of your own schooling experiences (i.e.: elementary and secondary school), could you briefly describe where you went to school prior to coming to this institution?

B) General Teaching Questions:

6. What inspired you to become a teacher in the first place?

7. How would you define teaching?

8. What does it mean to be a teacher?

9. Describe a good teacher.

10. Why do you feel this makes for a good teacher?

11. Can you think of examples from your life that represent characteristics/aspects/features of good teaching?

12. Tell me about your favourite teacher or teachers?

13. Please describe your ideal classroom as a teacher.

14. Please describe your ideal classroom as a learner.
15. How do you determine or judge such classrooms as good?

16. In terms of the teacher education program and your “on-campus” classes, tell me about your best day thus far in the program.

17. In terms of the teacher education program and your BC based practicum, tell me about your best day thus far in the program.

18. How would you describe your experience of “learning to become a teacher” in the teacher education program?

C) International Field Placement Questions:

19. What international experiences do you have?

20. Why are you choosing to do an international field placement?

21. What do you already know about the country in which your host school is located?

22. What do you know about the BC Offshore School system?

23. What do you expect the school (i.e.: the structure, set-up in terms of classrooms, facilities, etc.) to be like?

24. What do you expect the school culture (i.e.: the students, the parents, other teachers, administration, etc.) to be like?

25. Any particular thoughts about what you think will happen while you are away?

26. Any thoughts on the benefits and/or drawbacks of an international field placement?

27. What are you excited about? What are you nervous about?

28. Can you give an example of something that you think will feel will be “familiar” or “comfortable” to you in the international field placement?

29. Can you give an example of something that you think will feel “unfamiliar” or “strange” to you in the international field placement?
Appendix D

Pre-Placement Focus Group Questions

Metaphors for Teaching

- **Lamplighters** - They attempt to illuminate the minds of their learners.
- **Gardeners** - Their goal is to cultivate the mind by nourishing, enhancing the climate, removing the weeds and other impediments, and then standing back and allowing growth to occur.
- **Muscle builders** - They exercise and strengthen flabby minds so learners can face the heavyweight learning tasks of the future.
- **Bucket fillers** - They pour information into empty containers with the assumption that a filled bucket is a good bucket. In other words, a head filled with information makes an educated person.
- **Challengers** - They question learners’ assumptions, helping them see subject matter in fresh ways and develop critical thinking skills.
- **Travel guides** - They assist people along the path of learning.
- **Factory supervisors** - They supervise the learning process, making certain that sufficient inputs are present and that the outputs are consistent with the inputs.
- **Artists** - For them teaching has no prescriptions and the ends are not clear at the beginning of the process. The entire activity is an aesthetic experience.
- **Applied scientists** - They apply research findings to teaching problems and see scientific research as the basis for teaching.
• **Craftspeople** - They use various teaching skills and are able to analyze teaching situations, apply scientific findings when applicable, and incorporate an artistic dimension into teaching.

  (adapted from Apps (1991) pp. 23-24)
Appendix E

E-Journal Entry Prompts

1) Within the context of the school, something I noticed as unfamiliar is…

2) Elements of unfamiliarity include...

3) The impact of this on my teaching includes....

4) Within the context of the school, something I noticed as familiar is…

5) Elements of familiarity include....

6) Impacts on my teaching include.....

7) The artifact(s) I collected which represents my example of unfamiliarity and/or familiarity is....
Appendix F

During-Placement Interview Questions

1) How are things at school?

2) Since arriving in ____________, can you tell me about anything that you noticed as different at your school from a typical BC school in Canada?

3) Why did you find this to be different?

4) In what ways?

5) Can you tell me about anything that you noticed as challenging?

6) Why did you find this to be a challenge?

7) In what ways?

8) Can you tell me about anything you are doing differently in your teaching since arriving?

9) In what ways and why are you doing things differently?

10) Can you tell me about anything that you noticed as different from a typical school in BC at your school since we spoke last?

11) In what ways?

12) Why did you find this to be different?

13) In what ways?

14) Can you tell me about anything that you noticed as challenging since we spoke last?

15) Why did you find this to be a challenge?

16) In what ways?

17) Can you tell me about anything you are doing differently in your teaching since we spoke last?

18) In what ways and why are you doing things differently?
Appendix H

Post-Placement Interview Questions

1) Of the artifacts representing encounters of familiarity which one embodies this the most?

2) Why and how does it embody a point of familiarity in teaching and education?

3) How did you decide the artifact met your criteria of familiarity?

4) Would you judge the artifact and the point of familiarity it represents as good?

5) Why and how does it represent good teaching and education?

6) Of the artifacts representing encounters of unfamiliarity which one embodies this the most?

7) Why and how does it embody a point of unfamiliarity in teaching and education?

8) How did you decide the artifact met your criteria of unfamiliarity?

9) Would you judge the artifact and the point of unfamiliarity it represents as good?

10) Why and how does it represent a lack of good teaching and education?

11) Do you feel your understanding of good teaching and education has shifted or changed?

12) In what ways and how has your understanding changed?

13) Do you feel your understanding of good teaching and education has stayed the same/consistent?

14) In what ways and how has your understanding stayed the same?
Appendix I

Post-Placement Focus Group Questions

1) Describe one artifact representing an encounter of familiarity within teaching and education during your international field placement. How does the artifact represent the experience?

2) Describe one artifact representing an encounter of unfamiliarity within teaching and education during your international field placement. How does the artifact represent the experience?

3) Are there any comments or observations about the artifacts shared?

4) Are there any commonalities or anomalies between the artifacts?

5) How do the artifacts relate to your own experience of teaching on an international field placement?

Metaphors for Teaching

- **Lamplighters** - They attempt to illuminate the minds of their learners.

- **Gardeners** - Their goal is to cultivate the mind by nourishing, enhancing the climate, removing the weeds and other impediments, and then standing back and allowing growth to occur.

- **Muscle builders** - They exercise and strengthen flabby minds so learners can face the heavyweight learning tasks of the future.

- **Bucket fillers** - They pour information into empty containers with the assumption that a filled bucket is a good bucket. In other words, a head filled with information makes an educated person.
- **Challengers** - They question learners’ assumptions, helping them see subject matter in fresh ways and develop critical thinking skills.

- **Travel guides** - They assist people along the path of learning.

- **Factory supervisors** - They supervise the learning process, making certain that sufficient inputs are present and that the outputs are consistent with the inputs.

- **Artists** - For them teaching has no prescriptions and the ends are not clear at the beginning of the process. The entire activity is an aesthetic experience.

- **Applied scientists** - They apply research findings to teaching problems and see scientific research as the basis for teaching.

- **Craftspeople** - They use various teaching skills and are able to analyze teaching situations, apply scientific findings when applicable, and incorporate an artistic dimension into teaching.

(adapted from Apps (1991) pp. 23-24)

Questions

1) In your opinion, which metaphor represents good teaching the best?

2) How does the metaphor selected differ from the metaphor selected prior to the international field placement? (Note: If participants have trouble remembering their original selection, I will remind them here.)

3) If you chose a different metaphor, why? OR If you chose the same metaphor, how does your understanding of the metaphor differ?

4) How did your judgement of good differ?

5) Individually, can you give examples from your international field placement of situations where the type of teaching represented in the metaphor occurred?
6) Individually, how does the metaphor relate to your artifact of familiarity and/or unfamiliarity?

7) Individually, how do any of the artifacts fit into your idea of good teaching and education?
## Appendix J

### Study Participant Background and Contextual Details

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<sup>a</sup><sup>n</sup> = responses provided by participants during pre-placement individual interview. <sup>b</sup> IPP = International Practicum Placement program.


Appendix K

Molly Summary Chart of Familiar and Strange References

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## Appendix L

*Cathy Summary Chart of Familiar and Strange References*

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Appendix M

Anne Summary Chart of Familiar and Strange References

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Appendix N

Susan Summary Chart of Familiar and Strange References

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**Appendix O**

*Matt Summary Chart of Familiar and Strange References*

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Appendix P

*Bella Summary Chart of Familiar and Strange References*

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