Vol 6 | Issue 1 (2018) | pp. 75–83

JOURNAL OF
Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice

www.jpaap.napier.ac.uk

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: An Appropriate Methodology for Educational Research?

Edward John Noon, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

ABSTRACT

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a contemporary qualitative methodology, first developed by psychologist Jonathan Smith (1996). Whilst its roots are in psychology, it is increasingly being drawn upon by scholars in the human, social and health sciences (Charlick, Pincombe, McKellar, & Fielder, 2016). Despite this, IPA has received limited attention across educationalist literature. Drawing upon my experiences of using IPA to explore the barriers to the use of humour in the teaching of Childhood Studies (Noon, 2017), this paper will discuss its theoretical orientation, sampling and methods of data collection and analysis, before examining the strengths and weaknesses to IPA's employment in educational research.

Keywords: IPA; Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis; Phenomenology; Qualitative; Methodology.

Introduction

IPA is committed to the systematic exploration of personal experience (Tomkins, 2017). Its objective is to understand lived experiences and explore how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds; the meanings participants attach to particular experiences are considered the 'main currency' of IPA research (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Through the two complimentary commitments of IPA – 'giving voice' and 'making sense', researchers seek to attain an 'insider perspective' of lived experiences. To do so, IPA draws upon the fundamentals of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography.

Theoretical orientation

Phenomenology

Phenomenology refers to the "study of human experience and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 10). Phenomenologists endeavour to uncover meaning, and through focusing upon participants' streams of consciousness – their thoughts, feelings, and memories – they seek to access their inner life worlds. Consistent with its phenomenological origins, IPA seeks to understand the meanings individuals attach to human experience, and is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Indeed, it is dedicated to gleaning individuals' direct experiences through encouraging respondents to tell their own story in their own words – participants are considered the experiential experts. IPA does, however, make an "explicit commitment to person-in-environment and not just phenomenon-as-experienced" (Quest, 2014, p. 43); researchers must focus upon the context-dependent life worlds of participants, contingent upon social, historical and cultural factors (Eatough & Smith, 2008). As such, IPA is not 'simply descriptive'; the researcher is required to present an interpretive account of what it *means* for respondents to have such experiences, within their particular context (Noon, 2017).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the "practice or art of interpretation" (Dallmayr, 2009, p. 23) and involves "the restoration of meaning" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 8). IPA recognises that analysis always involves interpretation, and is strongly connected to hermeneutics in its recognition of the investigator's centrality to analysis and research (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). To garner an 'insider perspective' of experience, IPA dictates the requirement for a double hermeneutic: "the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world" (Smith, 2004, p. 40). Interpretations are therefore bounded by both the respondent's capacity to articulate their experiences, and the investigator's ability to dissect them. Indeed, the phenomenon is there, ready to "shine forth, but detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 35). As this process is invariably influenced and complicated by the researcher's own preconceptions (Heidegger, 1962), IPA recognises that it is impracticable to gain access to the exact personal world of another, completely or directly. The objective is, therefore, to obtain a description which gets as 'close' to the respondent's view as is possible (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Idiography

Idiography is a concern for individuality and a commitment to a rigorous finely-textured analysis of contingent, unique and often subjective phenomena (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). IPA is idiographic in that it emphasises detailed and in-depth examinations of how individual persons in their unique contexts make sense of a given phenomenon; it seeks to learn from each participant's individual story, and through a deep individualised analysis, a more informative understanding of participants' thoughts, beliefs and behaviours is attainable. Each individual case is central to IPA research; the investigator seeks to understand as much as possible about each respective case before progressing to the next (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & De Souza, 2011). Even during its subsequent cross-case analysis, IPA remains faithful to the individual, illustrating both the life world of respondents who have recounted their experiences, and elucidating how they align with more general themes (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

Sampling

IPA researchers seek to generate a purposive, fairly homogeneous sample; this ensures the study holds relevance and personal significance to respondents, and enables investigators to capture detail on a specific group of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon. The specificity of the sample is dependent upon the phenomena under investigation; whilst in some instances the research topic will only hold relevance to a limited number of people, thus defining the boundaries of the sample, in others – where a less specific issue is under investigation, the sample may be drawn from a population with similar demographics or socio-economic standing (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Having purposively identified the population which I wished to study, I elected to only invite educators who had at least six years of teaching experience across higher education to participate; this was to ensure that respondents had sufficient acquaintance with teaching across the tertiary sector to produce the in-depth, rich responses required for IPA. Thus, the sample was homogeneous in that they had all taught in higher education for at least six years, they all had the same academic rank, Senior Lecturer, they all taught on the same course, BA (Hons) Childhood Studies, and they all worked at the same institution, a Yorkshire-based post-1992 university.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 56) suggested that in IPA research, "there is no right answer to the question of...sample size". Yet, in embracing its idiographic commitment, smaller concentrated samples are commonly utilised. Clarke (2010) stipulated that three is the default sample size for undergraduate or Masters-level IPA study, whereas 4-10 is advised for professional doctorates. It has even been argued that a single participant study could be justified, providing they can generate a particularly rich or compelling case (Smith, 2004). I was eager to draw upon a sample that was able to generate sufficient data as to allow me to conduct an in-depth investigation, yet was also aware of the potential problems that would accompany data overload. In traditional phenomenological studies, Coyle (2014) noted that the average sample size was between one and 12; however, I considered that the latter end of that scale potentiated the collection of overwhelming levels of data which may have prevented me from remaining dedicated to each individual case. After much deliberation and consultation with my supervisor – my published study was derived from my MRes dissertation, I elected to incorporate five participants. Reflecting back on the process, data collection was manageable in terms of the amount of sheer data generated, whilst a smaller sample allowed me to commit to a thorough and in-depth analysis of each individual case, which in turn enabled me to highlight the individuality of particular experiences – a key principle of IPA.

Methods and data collection

IPA is best suited to a data collection approach which will "invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 56). Whilst diaries and focus groups can be employed, I elected to use semi-structured interviews. IPA interviews generally last at least an hour – though mine lasted around 50 minutes, and can become intense and involved. It is, therefore, vital for researchers to have developed their interview skills; I hold that active listening, empathy, and the ability to build trust and rapport with participants were all crucial to the production of rich data in my study. I conducted my interviews in a setting where only the participant and I were present; this helped to ensure confidentiality, enhance participant comfort, prevent interruptions and eliminate the possibility that the presence of others may contaminate data.

An interview schedule containing open-ended, non-directive questions was produced prior to the interview. Smith and Osborn (2008) noted that formulating a schedule will lead IPA researchers to explicitly consider what they think/hope the interview may cover, and enable them to identify any potential difficulties they may encounter in terms of question wording or sensitive topics. A useful interviewing approach that I drew upon when constructing my schedule was funneling; this technique is designed to enhance memory recall through starting with broad questions which seek to obtain as much information as possible, before culminating in a more specific line of questioning that is of particular concern to me, the researcher. For my study, this enabled me to garner participants' general views concerning pedagogy and humour, as well as their perspectives upon the role of humour in the classroom, and the barriers to its portrayal. This assisted me to glean a more holistic understanding of the social world I was attempting to enter, and thus acted as a powerful tool which aided me in my quest to conduct 'good' IPA.

It was important to recognise that whilst the guide was there to aid my navigation through the interview, its role was not to restrict lines of conversation; rather, the absence of a rigid schedule permitted respondents to exercise greater control over the flow of discussions, thus promoting their free speech and immersion in the interview process. The flexibility offered by an adaptable schedule allowed questions to be adjusted in light of the responses of participants, which, at times, led interviews in interesting and unexpected directions. During the data collection phase of the research, it became apparent that through diverging from the

interview schedule to pursue an idea in greater depth, it was possible to generate a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the participant's social world. Thus, by the final interview, respondents were given considerable leeway to discuss issues they considered to hold pertinent.

Prompts were also considered prior to data collection. IPA is concerned with the texture and depth of individual experience (Wedlock, 2016), and therefore requires participants to produce rich narratives; in instances where respondents were struggling to talk at length, or did not completely understand the question, prompts were drawn upon to enhance the richness of responses. For this study, however, prompts were used sparingly as participants were generally highly articulate and were able to perorate. As advised by much of the IPA literature, I audio recorded the interviews and subsequently produced a verbatim transcript of them.

Data analysis

IPA boasts a flexible set of guidelines which can be adapted by investigators in accordance with their research objective; indeed, researchers are encouraged to be creative in their thinking (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Nevertheless, IPA is characterised by a set of common principles which start with, but go beyond, a standard thematic analysis. Analysis is fluid, iterative and multi-directional, yet to illustrate how it unfolds, I placed the processes into distinct stages consistent with my data analysis.

Reading and note making

During the initial stage of data analysis, my transcripts were read and re-read; to enable my full immersion in the process, I elected to listen to audio recordings of the interview whilst reading the transcripts – my goal was to get as 'close' to the data as possible. With each reading, the text was annotated with initial ideas; this was done in a wide margin on the transcript. Whilst there are no rules concerning what can be commented on (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), notes were made regarding any thoughts, observations, and/or reflections relating to participant's narratives. It was important to go beyond mere description; I considered not only what was said, but also how it was said, and what this actually tells me about the experience – this was central to ensuring I produced a deeper, interpretive analysis. The use of open annotated coding helped to ensure that distinctive voices were able to emerge from participant's testimonies, rather than pre-existing notions present in the literature. An example of note making is shown in Figure 1.

Original transcript	Notes
Interviewer: We have discussed the benefits to using humour in your teaching, but is humour always positive? **Respondent:** I think you can overdo it. I think you have got to have that balance. When they are paying so much a year, they are not coming to listen to you talking nonsense. It is the balance of how much you are getting stuff across. You still want them to be engaged, and if it is humorous then that is good as they may remember it better. It has got to be sensitive in the big groups. I think in the past I have wanted to put clips on of programmes that I think are really funny, and I have almost wasted a day watching clips of these programmes trying to find the right one, and realised none of them are actually sensitive to everyone's way of being. Something like The Big Bang Theory, some people may find that offensive. I can find a clip of that that I might use, and not everyone would connect to that anyway. Sometimes visually things can be not funny to everyone. It may flip against you that you are really not funny when you are trying too hard. So that makes it worse. If it works in a positive sense it can only have benefits for everyone. But if you try too hard it does not come across that well.	Aware of the increasing costs of higher education, and wants to provide students with value for money. Is humour not seen as value for money? Does look to include humour in lessons, but recognises that a sense of humour is highly subjective, and does not want to offend any students. Believes that when educators try too hard they may come across as 'not funny' – could this be linked with a lack of confidence?

Figure 1

Notes to emergent themes

Once the transcript had been read, re-read, and annotated, I returned to the beginning of the transcript and documented any emerging themes. As detailed and comprehensive annotations were made in the previous stage, I drew emergent themes from the notes, rather than the transcript itself. I began to recognise similar themes emerging during initial note taking, yet it is during this secondary stage where I transformed these initial annotations into concise phrases which reflected the essence of what was unearthed from the transcript. Whilst these emergent themes were at a slightly more advanced level of abstraction than the initial notes – thus allowing theoretical connections to be made, it was ensured that they remained grounded in the particularity of the participant's initial response. Figure 2 shows an example of this process.

Notes	Emergent themes
Aware of the increasing costs of higher education, and wants to provide students with value for money. Is humour not seen as value for money?	Wants to provide value for money
Does look to include humour in lessons, but recognises that a sense of humour is highly subjective, and does not want to offend any students.	Does not wish to offend students
Believes that when educators try too hard they may come across as 'not funny' – could this be linked with a lack of confidence?	Does not want to 'try too hard' to use humour

Figure 2

Connecting emergent themes

This stage consisted of looking for connections between emergent themes according to conceptual similarities; as advised by Smith and Osborn (2008), I chose to do this on a separate piece of paper, with the emergent themes listed in chronological order, based on the sequence they appeared in the transcript. Whilst most themes clustered together, some emerged as superordinate concepts – thus holding hierarchical relationships with one another, and others were dropped entirely from the process having held a weak evidence base. As emergent themes were clustered, thus becoming sub-themes, I referred back to the transcripts to ensure the connections were consistent with the raw data; by this stage I had already drifted from the exact words of participants as per the interpretive analysis, yet I was keen to ensure that I stayed true to the essence of the participant's testimonies.

Producing table of themes

Once sub-themes were compiled into superordinate themes, thus providing a composite portrayal of experience (Denovan & Macaskill, 2012), they were subsequently placed into a table. The table situated the sub-themes within their respective superordinate theme, along with a relevant data extract or quote beside each theme, followed by the page number; doing so retained the voice of individual participant's personal stories, and also allowed the reader to track the analytic journey from the primary source material to the table of themes. An example of a table of themes from one of my participants can be found in Figure 3.

Themes	Quotes
The Lecture	
Less interaction in lecturers	I really like talking to you all and when it is a lecture you do not get a lot of feedback. You do feel you are just doing stand-up in a way as you are just standing there and everyone is listening. It is a bit one way (p. 5).
More comfortable in seminar	I would not say that I do not like lectures, I just prefer the small group interactions (p. 5).
'You can overdo it'	
Higher education is serious	It makes you think about practice – if you see really good stand-up you think maybe you could do more of that, and then you think no, as you are a lecturer. It is not meant to be entertainment - it is something quite serious (p. 3).
Wants to provide value for money	I think you can overdo it. I think you have got to have that balance. When they are paying so much a year, they are not coming to listen to you talking nonsense. It is the balance of how much you are getting stuff across (p. 6).

Does not want to 'try too hard' to use humour	It may flip against you that you are really not funny when you are trying too hard. So that makes it worse (p. 6).
Module Content	…sometimes it is really not appropriate to the subject matter. I think that some modules I would not add humour into many of the things. Like policy - like how do you make that funny? I probably could but I would have to really think about it. Or safeguarding, that would be inappropriate a lot of the time. It is just about engaging in the right way, and it is not always possible (p. 6).
Does not wish to offend students	It has got to be sensitive in the big groups. I think in the past I have wanted to put clips on of programmes that I think are really funny, and I have almost wasted a day watching clips of these programmes trying to find the right one, and realised none of them are actually sensitive to everyone's way of being. Something like The Big Bang Theory, some people may find that offensive (p. 6).

Figure 3

Continuing to the next case

The next stage involved moving onto the next transcript and repeating the process. Whilst earlier literature concerning IPA noted that the researcher may elect to draw upon themes from the first case to aid their subsequent analysis (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999), later discussions have placed a greater emphasis on approaching each case "on its own terms, to do justice to its own individuality" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 100). During this process, I considered it inevitable that my analysis would be influenced by my findings from the previous accounts, yet I strived, to the best of my abilities, to bracket the ideas that may have emerged from earlier transcripts.

Final table

Once each transcript had been analysed, I produced a final table of superordinate themes and their respective sub-themes. During this iterative process, I went back to the table of themes for each participant, reviewed them, and, if necessary, amended them and returned to the original transcripts. As this research consisted of multiple cases, the challenge here was to decide upon which themes to prioritise, and which to abandon. Smith and Osborn (2008) suggested that themes should not be selected purely on their prevalence within the data, but also on the richness of the passages which highlight said themes, and how the themes assist in illuminating other aspects of the account. As such, although I decided that at least two participants must have discussed a topic for it to be considered a theme, theme selection was also driven by the length at which such phenomena were discussed, and thus the level of pertinence placed upon them by participants. Whilst this may engender a danger that priority would be given to those participants who were more articulate and verbose, I hold that for my particular study – where all participants were experienced academics, this was not a concern, as all participants were able to confidently speak at length. My final table can be found in Figure 4.

Themes
Personality 'Dry academics' Teaching Persona **The Lecture** Lack of confidence Lack of interaction

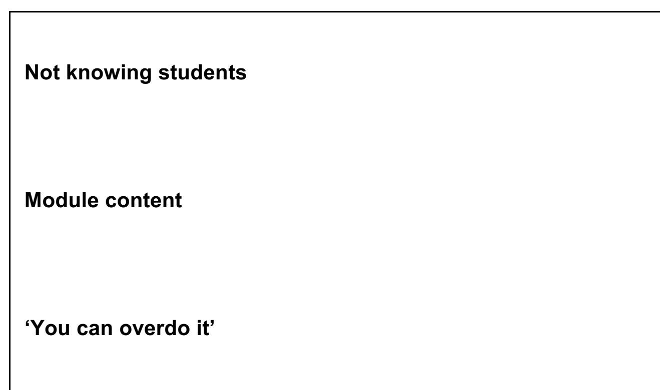

Figure 4

Writing up the research

There is no explicit distinction between analysis and writing up in IPA research – "as one begins to write, some themes loom large, others fade, and so this changes the report" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 110). During this final stage, the process became expansive once more, as I sought to unpack the table of themes and provide a description of the experiential accounts uncovered during analysis; themes had to be explained, illustrated and nuanced in a narrative account. Researchers must seek to distinguish between what participants actually said, and their interpretation of it; to do so, I elected to explicitly intersperse my narrative argument with verbatim extracts. As with alternative methodologies, IPA researchers are able to draw upon two presentation strategies: they may choose to use separate 'results' and 'discussion' sections – with the former containing the emergent thematic analysis and the latter linking the analysis back to the extant literature, or compile both elements into a single 'results and discussion' section (Smith & Osborn, 2008); I elected to collate a joint 'results and discussion' chapter as I contend that this aided the flow of both my dissertation and the subsequent published paper.

Strengths of IPA in education research

Subjective experience

The obvious appeal of IPA is that experience is a major subject matter within educational research. From instructors' distinctive teaching techniques and preferences, to students' unique learning styles and needs, the educational experience is inherently subjective. IPA explicitly recognises the utility of subjective experience as scientific data (Bush, Harris & Parker, 2016), and is particularly suitable for investigations which seek to explore the novelty or "uniqueness of a person's experiences, how experiences are made meaningful and how these meanings manifest themselves within the context of the person both as an individual and in their many cultural roles" (Shaw, 2001, p. 48). IPA's idiographic commitment ensures that themes remain personalised to individuals' narratives (Jeog & Othman, 2016); it is, therefore, able to reveal subtle, intimate, and nuanced accounts of teaching and learning experiences from the standpoint of those experiencing it. Since IPA is compelled with affording privilege to the voice of participants, I believe that it may be a particularly useful methodology for researching individuals or groups of individuals whose voices may otherwise go unheard, such as online/distance learners, LGBT pupils and educators, or those struggling with mental health disorders. Indeed, IPA has previously been successfully employed in a number of projects exploring such topics, including Goodall's (2014) study of teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children, Bailey's (2011) research concerning educators' perceptions of asylum seeker and refugee pupils, Roop's (2014) investigation of American transgender students' experiences of higher education, Willis' (2017) exploration of teaching assistants' experiences of forming relationships with pupils with autism, and Denovan and Macaskill's (2012) analysis of stress and coping in first year undergraduates.

Unexpected responses

The inductive nature of open questions and participant led interviews can lead IPA research in surprising directions (Eatough & Smith, 2008). As respondents expound their experiential accounts, investigators should seek to pursue them into novel and unanticipated arenas; after all, IPA holds that respondents are the experiential experts of the phenomenon under investigation. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 58) argued that such unexpected turns are often the most valuable aspects of interviewing: "on the one hand they tell us something we did not even anticipate needing to know; on the other, because they arise unprompted, they may well be of particular importance to the participant". Drifting from the interview schedule and exploring related but unanticipated topics enabled me to uncover intriguing phenomena that I had not previously considered, thus enriching my capacity to explore the social worlds of participants in a more holistic manner. In this sense, IPA can be considered data-driven, rather than theory-driven (Griffiths, 2009).

Accessibility and flexibility

Whilst many alternative qualitative methodologies have been critiqued for holding a somewhat 'mysterious' character (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), I considered IPA to be highly accessible. Its proponents have produced detailed guidance using easily comprehendable language (cf. Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012), thus providing educationalists new to IPA with a strong and stable base to construct their methodological framework from. It is hoped that this article – with its specific focus on IPA in educational research – will provide further support for investigators in the field who are new to this exciting methodology. Yet, these guidelines should be considered as just that – guidelines. IPA is not a prescriptive methodology which dictates formulaic procedures; rather, flexibility is one of its key tenets and strengths. Not only does IPA's fluidity allow researchers to adapt their methodology to accommodate the phenomena under investigation and preferred data collection methods, but it also enables investigators to draw upon their own experience-based interpretations.

Limitations and challenges of IPA in education research

Language barrier

A presupposition of IPA is that language provides participants with the necessary tools to capture their experiences – it relies upon the representational validity of language (Willig, 2013). I was fortunate that my sample consisted of experienced academics that were aware of the in-depth responses required for IPA and qualitative research in general. However, post-data collection I considered whether IPA would be as useful in educational studies where participants were not so au fait with the richness of response required, or when investigating the lived experience of young children, individuals with speech and language difficulties, or those of whom English is not their first language. Due to said individuals possessing difficulties with expressive and receptive language, articulation and understanding questions, it is probable that interview transcripts would be sparser, and thus, it would be more challenging for investigators to access the respondents' experiential worlds. Whilst prompts could be a valuable tool in such instances, IPA remains likely to exclude respondents with weak language skills, leading to their experiences being dismissed; in such instances, alternative methodology would appear more appropriate.

Uncomfortable dualism

IPA researchers are faced with dualistic tension between idiographic commitment and the search for connections across cases; the emphasis on commonality of experiences can lead individual differences to be obscured, and does appear at odds with the idiographic underpinning of IPA. Wagstaff et al. (2014) argued that whilst it is possible for respondents to be represented on opposite ends of a single theme, unless the study is of a single case, there is limited opportunity to generate unique themes. Indeed, Arroll (2015) noted that for sample sizes ranging from 4-8 participants, investigators ought to include extracts from at least three respondents in each theme. I hold that the level of 'discomfort' experienced by researchers is not only predicated upon their analytic skills and temperament, but also upon their elected sample size. With a sample of five, I did experience tension between committing to IPA's idiographic pledge and elucidating common themes, yet at no point did I consider this overpowering. Whilst I do hold that the search for similarities across cases did reduce the idiographic focus of the study, it was possible to highlight each participant's unique idiosyncrasies within shared higher order concepts. However, I concede that when writing the published article based upon my MRes dissertation (Noon, 2017), I found this considerably more challenging; most journals impose word limits on paper lengths, and I felt these restrictions led me towards focusing on the overall, general themes, rather than on the individual participants. It may, therefore, be wise for IPA researchers writing for publication to be wary of word limits, and to curtail other sections of their article to ensure that their findings are not diluted.

Generalisability

Smaller sample sizes inevitably raise questions concerning representativeness and transferability of findings, and can lead to difficulty in getting IPA studies published (Charlick et al., 2016). However, in IPA research, "fewer participants examined at a greater depth is always preferable to a broader, shallow and simply descriptive analysis of many individuals" (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 756); IPA is, therefore, very cautious about general claims. The objective for educationalists drawing upon IPA should not be to uncover what occurs in *all* settings, but rather the perceptions and understandings of a particular group within *their* setting. Smith and Osborn (2003) wrote that IPA ought to be considered in terms of theoretical rather than empirical generalisability; that is, readers should be able to draw links between the findings of an IPA study, the extant literature, and their own personal and professional experiences. This does not mean that IPA is opposed to general claims; moreover, through the gradual accumulation of similar studies, more general claims can be made.

Ethical considerations

Since IPA studies often involve the exploration of intensely personal experiences, it is possible that interviews can lead participants to feel awkward, ashamed, angry or even emotional, which can present investigators with a range of ethical dilemmas. Thus, in addition to attaining informed consent and protecting anonymity through employing pseudonyms, I ensured that I constantly monitored the effect of the interviews upon the participants. Whilst it was unlikely that discussing the barriers of pedagogical humour would lead respondents to tell intimate stories, I was aware that the fluid nature of the interview did increase the likelihood that participants may bring up sensitive or distressing experiences. Should the latter occur investigators must be prepared to make a tactful decision: are they to continue to discuss the experience in a gentler manner, or are they to discontinue this line of questioning? In such instances, researchers may find themselves faced with role conflict (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008); although many educationalists have received training to assist them in supporting distressed individuals, their current role is not a psychologist, a therapist, a teacher or a social worker, but an investigator seeking information. Thus, should they deploy their taught skills to both comfort the participant and carry forward the interview, or is this beyond their remit as a researcher?

Conclusion

Having reflected upon my use of IPA, I hold that it has the potential to be a powerful tool in helping researchers to understand the lived experiences of those within the education system. Through appreciating said experiences, it is possible that the findings of IPA studies can contribute in assisting educationalists in shaping future policy and practice around the needs and expectations of both students and educators. Overall, I found the process stimulating and rewarding, yet, should researchers wish to conduct a 'good' IPA, they must hold a grasp of the philosophy underpinning the methodology, strong interviewing skills and the ability to commit to a systemic and meticulous analysis of accounts. Whilst I do not intend for this paper to represent a 'how to' manual – I too still have much to learn about IPA, it is hoped that my reflective insights on the process are valuable for others across education who may wish to conduct research using this exciting new methodology.

Biographies

Edward Noon is a PhD candidate and Associate Lecturer on the Early Childhood and Childhood Studies Programme at Sheffield Hallam University. His doctoral research seeks to explore how social comparison on social network sites influences adolescent identity development. Twitter – @EdwardJNoon

Reference list

Arroll, M. A. (2015). Health Psychology and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In M. J. Langweilder, & P. W. McCarthy (Ed.), *Methodologies for Effectively Assessing Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)* (pp. 43-51). London: Singing Dragon.

Bailey, S. (2011). *Taking up the Challenge: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of teachers' perceptions regarding the presence of asylum seeker and refugee pupils (ASR) within mainstream primary schools in the Midlands, and the implications this may hold for Educational Psychologists practice* (Doctoral thesis). The University of Birmingham, Birmingham.

Biggerstaff, D., & Thompson, A. R. (2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): A Qualitative Methodology of Choice in Healthcare Research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 5*(3), 214-244. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880802314304

Brocki, J. M., & Wearden, A. J. (2006). A critical evaluation of the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in health psychology. *Psychology & Health*, *21*, 87-108. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/14768320500230185

Bush, J., Harris, D. M., & Parker, R. J. (2016). *Cognitive Self Change: How Offenders Experience the World and What We Can Do About It*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119106272

Cassidy, E., Reynolds, F., Naylor, S., & De Souza, L. (2011). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis to inform physiotherapy practice: An introduction with reference to the lived experience of cerebellar ataxia. *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice, 27*(4), 263-277. doi: https://doi.org/10.3109/09593985.2010.488278

Charlick, S., Pincombe, J., McKellar, L., & Fielder, A. (2016). Making sense of participant experiences: Interpretative phenomenological analysis in midwifery research. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 11*, 205-216. doi: https://doi.org/10.28945/3486

Clarke, V. (2010). Review of the book "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research". *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 9, 57-56.

Coyle, D. (2014). Phenomenology. In A. McIntosh-Scott, T. Mason, E. Mason-Whitehead, & D. Coyle (Ed.), *Key Concepts in Nursing and Healthcare Research* (pp. 116-124). London: Sage.

Dallmayr, F. (2009). Hermeneutics and inter-cultural dialog: linking theory and practice. *Ethics & Global Politics*, *2*, 23-39. doi: https://doi.org/10.3402/egp.v2i1.1937

Denovan, A., & Macaskill, A. (2012). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of stress and coping in first year undergraduates. *British Educational Research Journal*, *39*(6), 1002-1024. doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3019

Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In C. Willig, & W. Stainton-Rogers (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 179-194). Los Angeles: Sage. doi: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607927.n11

Goodall, D. (2014). *An Interpretative Phenomenological Study Exploring Designated Teachers' Experiences of Supporting Looked After Children* (Doctoral thesis). The University of Sheffield, Sheffield.

Griffiths, M. (2009). *Parent and Child Experiences of Childhood Cancer: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Approach*. Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Hefferon, K., & Gil-Rodriguez, E. (2011). Methods: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *The Psychologist*, *24,* 756-759.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Jeog, H., & Othman, J. (2016). Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis from a Realist Perspective. *The Qualitative reports, 21*(3), 558-570.

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and method.* London: Pearson Education.

Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3,* 102-120.

Moses, J. W., & Knutsen, T. L. (2012). *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-00841-1

Noon, E. J. (2017). An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Barriers to the Use of Humour in the Teaching of Childhood Studies. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 5*(3), 45-52. doi: https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v5i3.255

Pietkiewicz, I. & Smith, J.A. (2012) Praktyczny przewodnik interpretacyjnej analizy fenomenologicznej w badaniach jakościowych w psychologii. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne, 18*(2), 361-369.

Quest, D. A. (2014). *Out of the Way and Out of Place: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Social Interactions of Bisexually Attracted Young People*. Portland State University, Portland.

Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Roop, N. P. (2014). *Transgender students in higher education: an ipa study of experiences and access of transgender students* (Doctoral thesis). Northeastern University, Boston.

Shaw, R. (2001). Why use interpretative phenomenological analysis in Health Psychology? *Health Psychology Update*, *10*(4), 48-52.

Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health, 11*, 261-271. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/08870449608400256

Smith, J. A. (2004). Reflecting on the development of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *1*, 39-54.

Smith, J. A., & Eatough, V. (2006). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In G. M. Breakwell, S. Hammond, C. Fife-Schaw, & J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Research Methods in Psychology* (pp. 322–341). London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretive phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.) *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51-80). London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods* (pp. 53-81). London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage.

Smith, J.A., Jarman, M. & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In M. Murray, & K. Chamberlain (Ed.), *Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods* (pp. 218-240). London: Sage. doi: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446217870.n14

Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative Research Methods in Sport, Exercise and Health: From Process to Product*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Tomkins, L. (2017). Using Interpretative Phenomenological Psychology in Organisational Research with Working Carers. In J. Brook, & N. King (Ed.), *Applied Qualitative Research in Psychology* (pp. 86-100). London: Palgrave.

Wagstaff, C., Jeong, H., Nolan, M., Wilson, T., Tweedlie, J., Phillips, E,... Holland, F. (2014). The Accordion and the Deep Bowl of Spaghetti: Eight Researchers' Experiences of Using IPA as a Methodology. *The Qualitative Report, 19*, 1-15.

Wedlock, M. (2016). *"You kind of pull back the layers": The experience of inter-professional supervision with Educational Psychologists.* Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology, University of Essex.

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Willis, A. P. (2017). An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of teaching assistants' experiences of forming relationships with pupils who have Autistic Spectrum Disorder in mainstream primary schools (Doctoral thesis). University of Essex, Colchester. doi: https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719095863.003.0012