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**"STEPPING BEYOND THE KNOWN"**

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING REGISTERED NURSE  
STUDENTS: AN INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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**Margaret Idour**

M.A. (Hons), (Massey), B.A. (Massey), Dip.R.Ed. (Cambridge), I.D.C. (Canterbury,U.K.), R.N., R.M.,  
Cert. Neurosurgical Nursing (Dunedin), Cert. Plunket N.

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# **A B S T R A C T**

## **"STEPPING BEYOND THE KNOWN"**

### **THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING REGISTERED NURSE STUDENTS: AN INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

The thesis employed a Heideggerian Hermeneutical Analysis (HHA) approach for a study of returning registered nurse students (RRNS) from a nursing/health management context. In essence, a descriptive interpretive study the intent has been to unveil the common meanings embedded in the lived experience of RRNS return to formal (advanced) studies. The phenomenon or issue of interest was pursued in the form of a question: *What is meaningful and significant for participant RRNS in their everyday world on re-engaging in formal (advanced) studies?*

There is a marked scarcity of research from the RRNS viewpoint, so the focus of the study was to understand what RRNS themselves found to be the highlights of the experience. The study participants included RRNS coming from a management background and, therefore, very much at the cutting edge of rapid and continuing change in health care provision. In addition to personal and professional reasons for returning to study, what the narratives disclosed was the compelling need experienced by the RRNS to increase their understanding of changing requirements in the workplace. They looked for new possibilities to transform management of nursing/health services and for learning experiences favourable to that purpose. A key aspect of their concern related to the interactive nature of their lived experience as a RRNS with the entire context of their everyday world, that is, with the connections and relations between the study-work-homespace.

Fourteen RRNS from an established university nursing programme offering graduate courses of study in nursing participated in extended non-structured interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were held during 1993 in many different places, as chosen by participants, some in the home but mostly in the work setting. This had an unanticipated benefit because participants, acting as the researcher's host/hostess being at 'home' and comfortable in telling their 'stories' took 'charge' of the occasion. The interviews, with the consent of the participants, were audiotaped and then transcribed.

The texts (transcriptions) were analysed hermeneutically using Heideggerian phenomenology as the philosophical background. HHA is centred on a particular tradition of philosophy whose concern is the meaning of Being. The concern is to make visible participants' experience of their 'world'. In this instance, it was the everyday 'world' of the participant RRNS and the lived meanings of what they experienced on return to formal (advanced) studies. Hence everyday lived experience is the focus of attention in Heideggerian phenomenology. In this research approach what is sought is understanding not explanation. It is a premise of phenomenology that, in general, an understanding of the meaning and significance of the lived experience can be acquired

from the 'things' (the phenomena under study) themselves. Approaching a participant as an expert by virtue of directly experiencing the phenomenon, is basic to phenomenology. Hermeneutic analysis of the texts of the participant RRNS affirmed the authenticity of those assumptions.

In the present study several common or major themes, two relational themes and one constitutive pattern were identified through the process of textual interpretation. The constitutive pattern, expressing the full complexity of the relations and connections between the themes, was found to be present in all fourteen texts; the nature of a constitutive pattern being 'that it's always there'. The constitutive pattern '*Nursing is Dwelling in Thoughtful Concern as Context Calls Forth*', emerged as the major finding of the study. This pattern witnesses to the pragmatism that is inherent in nursing and commonly found in nurses' responses to the challenges presented by continuing and rapid change. For the participant RRNS nursing had become a way of engaging their energies in the workplace as appropriate to a given place, time and culture. The two relational themes accent particular aspects of the constitutive pattern. '*Nursing is a whole pile of things*'; and '*Curriculum: Reflective Openness*' reveal the inherent meanings of the constitutive pattern. Firstly, that nursing is diverse in practice and has many dimensions; and, secondly, that a curriculum befitting the diversity of nursing requires us to constantly challenge and test the learning experiences we provide for RRNS.

The fourteen RRNS participating in the study traversed diverse pathways to acquire the understanding and skills required for altered health care structures. Adopting new relationships and 'leaping-ahead' (Heidegger, 1962), to be able to see the whole picture of what was being experienced in nursing/health care, reveals the RRNS becoming-as interpreters for both colleagues and clients. Leaping-ahead is reflective of thoughtful concern as the pattern of responding to presenting need. This way of living a life as a nurse transforms work. The participant RRNS disclose that, dwelling in such a way in nursing/health work opens up a future of possibilities which brings all the presenting needs into focus. Sharing the story of their lifeworld as RRNS, the participants have exemplified the '*reflective openness*' Senge (1990, 277 - 281) advocates, as being a prerequisite for 'learning organisations'. Contemporary organisations require us to challenge our own thinking as well as being free to speak our minds (*participant openness*). Appreciating that, however much we value our daily life practices and understandings, they need to be '*always subject to test and improvement*'. In effect, what the participants have bestowed on us is that, within the framework of a curriculum for RRNS and the content learning of a given course, we must generate a process of learning amenable to both individual and group requirements.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Freedom is essential ground for being human but we learn our 'humanness' only in association with other humans. Similarly, freedom is essential for the thinking that we engage in as we live our daily lives and in whatever way we may apply it to some special project. But in the necessity to challenge and to test our own thinking and its genuineness (Senge's 'reflective openness'), we need the constant challenge that can only come from those who sojourn along the way with us. Whatever clarity of thought and depth of understanding we acquire as we pursue a research study, arises from a long, arduous period of work with its own highlights and challenges. But it is enriched as well as challenged by the many people who share that time with us. There are those who have been directly involved in thinking through and giving direction to the present study. Others, from times before as well as during the present study, have been indirectly involved. I am indebted to you all.

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To family and friends, in New Zealand and elsewhere, thank you for your support and encouragement and your patience in receiving so many 'not yet's' on asking '*Have you finished the "book"?*' Well, as van Manen (1991) describes it, the work of the researcher is '*writing*' and '*rewriting*' so describing the research project as the "book" is very apt.

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## GLOSSARY

This glossary defines words not explained in the text.

Andragogy:	The science and study of adult learning/teaching. Differentiated from pedagogy which is described as the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children and requiring constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations.
Dasein	The entity that expresses ways of Being as ongoing and practical coping of everyday life. A way of being that only humans can experience. Being is an issue or has meaning for Dasein
Human Science	This term covers a variety of approaches and orientation to research and comes from Dilthey's notion of ' <i>Geisteswissenschaften</i> '. Dilthey(1987) argued that human phenomena (mental, social, Historical) differ from natural (physical, chemical, behavioral) phenomena in that human phenomena require interpretation and understanding whereas natural science involves for the most part external observation and explanation.
Lived Experience	Refers to the totality and infinitude of human existence.
Lifeworld	The "world of immediate experience," (Husserl, 1970a, 103 - 186). the 'world' as "already there," "pregiven," - natural, primordial.
Intentionality	This term indicates the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world. Brentano, and later Husserl, argued that the fundamental structure of consciousness is intentional (Spiegelberg, 1982). And every conscious experience is bi-polar: there is an object that presents itself to a subject or ego. This means that all thinking is always thinking about something. The same is true for actions: grasping is grasping for something .. All human activity is always <i>oriented</i> activity, directed by that which orients it.

Intersubjectivity	This is the verbal and nonverbal interplay between the organized subjective worlds of two people (Paterson & Zderad, 1976, 1990) in which one person's subjectivity intersects with another's subjectivity. The subjective world of any individual represents the organization of feeling, thoughts, ideas, principles, theories, illusions, distortions, and whatever else helps or hinders that person.
Primary Health Care (PHC)	This term refers to an approach or philosophy that has been adopted by most national health care systems and has been sponsored by WHO. The key objective of PHC is to achieve access to the means of health for all citizens. For this purpose emphasis is given to the development of basic health care workers who can provide essential knowledge and coping skills for individuals at the point of need.
RCompN	Registered comprehensive nurse in New Zealand who has completed a 3 year course of study at a Polytechnic.
Relationality or ' <i>Lived other</i> '	This term refers to the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them.
Thrownness	Dasein exists in a world not of its own choice or making. It refers to the past and how Dasein arrives at the situation where it finds itself. How we arrive at our facticity.
Understanding	A component of the disclosure process in which Dasein is free to incorporate the object of understanding within its own potentiality-for-Being. This existential way of Being takes place within a state-of-mind or mood; articulated through discourse. As a result understanding, meaning is projected.
Worldhood	The ontological concept which makes the "wherein" a factual Dasein as such can be said to live.
<b>Note:</b>	Word descriptions from van Manen (1990), Diekelmann, 1993), Idour (1990)