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Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina

A participatory narrative inquiry of specialist teachers' practice in
Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

Teachers work within a range of personal and contextual factors that serve as enablers and barriers to their professional identity, practice and wellbeing. There is a need to explore their perspectives of the current education context, and their roles within it, to better understand the ways teachers experience and position themselves within and against the tensions posed by an increasingly complex world. This research is timely as it investigates an emerging group of professionals, specialist teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, who integrate postgraduate study with new professional roles and the other facets of their lives. Using a participatory narrative inquiry, steeped in positive psychology and biculturally responsive practice, the present study identifies connections across identity, practice and wellbeing as knowing oneself and conceptualizing practice as relational; ecological and contextualized; challenging and requiring lifelong learning. Alongside the enablers of trust and agency, the research foregrounds the tensions of working in a system straddling special and inclusive education and other unintended barriers to professional practice. Enablers, tensions and mediating variables are unpacked with a focus on the way agentic professionals navigate their personal and professional lives. Findings from the present study informed the development of a framework for the fulfilment of teachers through fierce practice comprised of stance, supports and stamina. This framework has utility at the individual level, supporting the fulfilment of individual teachers. At the systems level, the framework may be of interest to tertiary teachers and institutions wishing to help teachers to develop and sustain meaningful and satisfying lives.

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Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini

My success should not be bestowed onto me alone; as it was not individual success
but the success of a collective

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

At its essence, this is a study of how teachers co-construct and navigate their lives in order to practise in ways that feel true, effective and fulfilling. The research is situated in Aotearoa New Zealand, with fourteen teachers enrolled in a postgraduate specialist teaching programme supported by the Ministry of Education as part of its aim of creating a fully inclusive society. The study provides a snapshot of these teachers' lives, over a two year period, as they work to integrate life, practice and study.

As experienced teachers training for and working in specialist roles, this unique group encounters the range of rewards and tensions typically experienced by all teachers. Additionally, they face the challenges of returning to study, balancing advanced degree completion with full-time practice, and shifting their focus to supporting teachers and systems to cater more effectively for all children and young people. Along the way, they re-story themselves as change agents for a more fair and equitable society.

Ultimately, this study considers how best to fortify all teachers personally and professionally, as well as the ways postgraduate study might support them to negotiate their future professional journeys with authenticity, purpose and wellbeing.

Context of the present study

Participants were enrolled a national postgraduate programme in Specialist Teaching (ST) for experienced teachers and other professionals. The programme, first developed in 2010, offers advanced qualifications to experienced teachers with endorsements in Autism Spectrum Disorder, Blind and Low Vision, Complex Educational Needs, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Early Intervention, Gifted and Talented, and Learning and Behaviour. A blended learning approach, combining face-to-face opportunities with online study, allows for the flexibility and accessibility required by a geographically diverse student body, as well as the face-to-face contact essential for interprofessional networking. The ST programme has a strong focus on self-directed learning, whereby

students identify their own learning needs and professional goals against a set of competencies, and demonstrate their growth through ePortfolios (Mentis et al., 2016).

Specialist Teaching students are typically experienced teachers exchanging the classroom for itinerant roles as specialist teachers. The majority of students secure study awards from the Ministry of Education, which pay their fees and block course expenses, and grant them up to forty study days annually. Students typically complete four courses over two years. As they are often mid-career, ST students usually practice full-time alongside their study, and balance work and study with family commitments to both younger children and aging parents. For a high proportion of students, their professional role is new, and postgraduate study is stipulated as part of their employment conditions. Many students completed their initial degrees some time ago. These students look to their tertiary teachers for guidance on 21st Century learning (e.g. blended, self-directed) alongside the knowledge and skills of their profession.

Specialist teachers work in a range of roles supporting classroom teachers to implement inclusive approaches to enhance the presence, participation and learning of all children and young people. They also support children identified as priority learners, including children with disabilities and those who otherwise experience barriers to their full participation. These roles bring with them new challenges and opportunities, such as the increased scope to work with families/whānau, teachers, schools and early childhood centres, and other providers in the education and health sectors. Working in new ways, specialist teachers come to see themselves as agents of change, working to shift attitudes and practices, and foreground matters of equity and inclusion for children and young people who have been marginalised in education.

I work full-time on the Specialist Teaching programme; participants in the present study were studying in the programme alongside their specialist teaching practice. Together, using a collaborative and participatory approach to research, we explored the connections between identity, practice and wellbeing. We endeavoured to develop a conceptual framework for tertiary providers wishing to intentionally support the wellbeing, learning and practice of their students (Kupchella, 2009). Ultimately, of course, we believe bolstering professionals in education will benefit the children and

families with whom educators work by cultivating the best each professional has to offer (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006).

My own positioning

I was born and raised in the United States, and acknowledge the many ways my mainstream, middle-class experiences have shaped my worldview. I attribute my love of diversity, my optimism and a sense of self-efficacy to the places and people who raised me. Still, I have made the deliberate choice to live my life and raise my family in Aotearoa New Zealand because I deeply identify with its cultures, most especially its indigenous culture. I am indebted to friends who have shared Māori ways of knowing and doing, and have deepened and extended values I have always held dear but have not always had a name for. *Manaakitanga* (generosity and care for others) and *whakawhanaungatanga* (relationship-building) are two of these values, and I am grateful to a country that allows me to embed these values in my life and in my work. Because of this resonance of values, I now choose to identify as *Pākehā* (non-Māori – see Appendix A).

The present study emanates from the diverse experiences I have had as a tertiary teacher over the past eleven years. Working with varied students and in various contexts – a reservation-based undergraduate programme for Native American early childhood educators, a Masters in Counselling programme at Oregon State University, and now the Specialist Teaching programme at Massey University – common threads have emerged in my interactions with students. Across contexts, continents and content areas, teachers seem to experience similar tensions. Often, they practice within personal, professional and contextual stressors that can interfere with their ability to learn and reflect deeply, apply new knowledge and skills, and practice in ways that are consistent with their professional beliefs. Postgraduate students in particular can be at an age and stage where they are dealing with their own health issues, or supporting aging parents and young children, in addition to their own work and study commitments (Moore, Bledsoe, Perry, & Robinson, 2011).

Studying alongside practice seems to embolden students in some ways, including strengthening their professional networks and knowledge base. Wellbeing, however, can suffer during tertiary study, and caring for students in holistic ways seems to improve the depth of their motivation, creativity and learning.

As part of my wider role as a teacher on the Specialist Teaching programme, I coordinate the marking across large, interprofessional courses; administer requests for extensions on assignments, and provide pastoral care and support with study as needed. Juxtaposing these three responsibilities has afforded me a bird's eye view of student wellbeing and an appreciation of some of the enablers and barriers to effectively managing postgraduate study and professional practice. Overseeing students' detailed extension requests gives me an appreciation of the wider variables in students' lives that can act as barriers to their study and practice.

Irrespective of other life circumstances, postgraduate study comes with its own stressors. Experienced practitioners encounter feelings of being a novice again; learning curves are high and often in multiple areas. As professionals in the current Aotearoa New Zealand inclusive education context, each specialist teacher must determine how they are best poised to make a difference. Having worked as an educational psychologist for twenty years, often alongside my own study, I have an appreciation of the rewards and tensions and an interest in the ways specialist teachers negotiate their lives.

My current role has deepened and refined my professional interest in teachers' sense of fulfilment and the part to be played by tertiary education. Observing the different ways tertiary teachers respond to the wellbeing of their students has provided me with models of relationship-based pedagogy (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009) and teaching within a culture of care (Walshaw & Anthony, 2007). Many tertiary teachers understand and support their students holistically, considering outside factors such as elderly parents in their care, and personalise their pastoral care to reflect these factors.

Seeing the range of ways fellow tertiary teachers respond to students' circumstances has given me insight into the tension between student support and programme

accountability. Tertiary teachers conceptualise, and try to provide, the right balance of support and challenge to further the development of professionals, without creating so much pressure that they move from learning into 'survival mode' (Korthagen, 2009). Conversely, they avoid watering down challenges and expectations to the point that transformative learning can no longer occur.

These dilemmas are important because of the role tertiary teachers play in students' professional lives, for a brief but critical period of time. In a lifelong learning paradigm, we play an important role in preparing teachers who embody the four pillars underpinning life and education: learning to know; learning to be; learning to do and learning to live together (Delors, 1996).

The present study

This research explores specialist teachers' lived experiences to better understand the implications for their ongoing practice and the professional programmes that prepare them. The study is steeped in sociocultural theory, where learning is seen as occurring within culturally authentic interactions and contexts (Macfarlane, 2015) and is influenced by three sociocultural theorists in particular. Wenger (2000) taught me that learning is a situated and social activity; our identities are shaped through becoming and belonging to our various communities of practice. From Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), I learned to appreciate the dynamic and reciprocal ways we influence, and are influenced by, the nested systems within which we live, and the importance of individual agency. Kelchtermans (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2002; Kelchtermans, 2008; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002) pulls these ideas together for me, considering contextualised self-understanding as critical to teacher learning, identity and practice. Their collective works have informed the present study which aspires to look deeply and broadly at the layers of teachers' lives. Ecological systems theory is particularly relevant as it shapes the way I conceptualise the overall research aims and methods, my approach to analysis and the structure of the findings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009).

The research is timely as it addresses the challenges and tensions teachers face in an increasingly complex and demanding world, and identifies a much-needed approach to navigating these demands in effective and authentic ways. The research questions are:

1. How do participants make sense of the concepts of professional identity, wellbeing, and authentic practice?
2. What do they see as the connections between these ideas?
3. What do participants identify as the enablers, barriers and tensions to the development of their professional identity, wellbeing and authentic practice?
4. How do participants position themselves within and against the tensions in their professional lives?

These questions were explored through semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings conducted with fourteen specialist teachers over a two-year period. Using a participatory narrative inquiry research design, I worked to understand the enablers and barriers encountered by specialist teachers and the effects these had on their identity, practice and wellbeing. A thematic analysis of their individual and collective stories guided the development of a framework for teachers and tertiary teachers wanting to support learning that is sustainable and transformative, learning that changes and harmonizes who we are with what we do in our practice (Korthagen, Kim, & Greene, 2012).

Thesis structure

The thesis contains eight chapters. The first half of the thesis is presented in a linear, traditional manner. The last four chapters deviate from conventional structure and sequence, instead using the structure that best presents the study. Specifically, these chapters continue to integrate findings and discussions in order to address the research questions; unpack the individual components of the *Practising Fiercely* framework and then consider the framework as a whole, and evaluate the strengths and limitations of the present study. It is particularly unconventional to introduce participant voice in a Conclusion chapter. However, relegating this source of

information to earlier sections would detract from the spirit of the study and minimise the participatory and iterative nature of the research.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter summarises the guiding problem and the context of the problem. It moves from a big picture to the specifics of the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The literature review situates the thesis within the Aotearoa New Zealand education context as well as the Specialist Teaching programme within which the participants were studying. Current initiatives and tensions in education are summarised, along with the key literature around professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing and the implications of each for tertiary programmes.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This research is undertaken to answer four questions around professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing. The methodology chapter describes the structure of the study including methods of data collection and analysis. Ethical issues are considered and addressed. Specifically the chapter overviews the participatory narrative inquiry approach, as well as the ways it is influenced by positive psychology and biculturally responsive approaches to research. The methods of interviews and focus groups are explained, as well as matters of trustworthiness throughout the research process. Ecological system theory is summarised, with links to the analysis and presentation of the findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings: Professional Identity, Authentic Practice and Wellbeing

This chapter summarises the findings in relation to the first two research questions, using data gathered through interviews and focus groups conducted in 2014. Participants' understandings of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing are summarised, as well as the intersection of these constructs from the perspective of

participants. As participants viewed professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing as more connected than separate, the findings are focused on the connections *across* constructs.

Additionally, reflecting on initial interview and focus group data, as well as the literature, the participants and I started to question the accuracy of these initial terms and associated understandings. This chapter examines the ways we modified the research questions in 2015, to reflect these refined understandings, and to incorporate language that better captured these interpretations. Specifically, alongside questions of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing, we explicitly discussed the constructs of *fulfilment*, *stance*, *support* and *stamina* in the second phase of the study.

Chapter 5 – Findings: Enablers, Tensions and Mediating Variables for Participants

Chapter 5 answers the third research question, examining the enablers, barriers and tensions participants encountered in developing their professional identities, authentic practice and wellbeing. Enablers and barriers were often flip sides of the same coin; for brevity and clarity, the majority of the data is shared as tensions encountered by participants as they negotiated their identities and practices as specialist teachers. Considering tensions rather than barriers allowed me to foreground the agency of individuals in negotiating their roles and their lives. The mediating variables, having a sense of agency and a sense of belonging, are also discussed.

Chapter 6 – Findings and Discussion: The Ways Participants Positioned Themselves Within and Against the Tensions of Their Roles

This chapter explores the ways participants navigated tensions they experienced in answer to the final research question. Their strategies drew on and informed the conceptual framework of *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*; thus these findings are presented together and in relation to this conceptual framework. Data from post-2015 and the final focus group meeting are foregrounded, and substantiated with the literature, in order to explicate the individual components of the conceptual framework developed in the second iteration of the study.

Chapter 7 – Findings and Discussion of the Framework “Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina”

Shifting from the individual components to the framework as a whole, this chapter discusses *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina* as an overarching framework. The original contribution of this study to the current body of knowledge is summarised, alongside key points of convergence and divergence with the literature. Implications for individual professionals are considered, as well as for postgraduate programmes and organisations interested in developing identity and wellbeing of their students/professionals.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

The concluding chapter restates the main findings, contribution to the body of knowledge, and central message of the research. Strengths, limitations and future research directions are considered, as are the implications of the present study. The chapter also identifies lessons learned from a participatory methodology striving to be biculturally responsive and authentic.

As this research was defined by its participatory nature, participants were invited to comment on any personal research benefits as part of their final interviews. Their feedback is summarised thematically, and juxtaposed with the tenets of emancipatory pedagogy. New findings are not typically included in a concluding chapter; however, this is my judgement of how and where it is best presented.

Choice of language

Aotearoa New Zealand has three official languages: English, *te reo Māori*, and New Zealand Sign Language. Te reo Māori, the language of Aotearoa New Zealand’s indigenous people, was in decline as a consequence of colonisation (Durie, 2011). Increasingly, as part of the revitalisation of te reo Māori and an overall emphasis on social justice, Māori and non-Māori professionals work to expand and utilise the Māori language. There are times when this is especially important, as the words in te reo connote meanings that are lost in direct translations to English.

As such, several terms in te reo Māori are used in this thesis. *Whānau* is used to describe family-like groupings, including the focus group formed as part of this research. Whānau connotes the responsibilities, ties and commitment one might find in a close-knit family, and thus depicts the relational strength of these groups.

Whakawhanaungatanga, from the root word whānau, describes the process of building relationships in ways that result in strong bonds and reciprocal commitment. As this research was based in the relationships with and between participants, these words anchored us in the potential of the research to create a sense of belonging and mutual benefit. A glossary of Māori terms is included as Appendix A.

Language is powerful in English as well, and the words used to describe children and young people inevitably position the speaker and influence the audience. While the vision of inclusive education – high-quality, fair and equitable systems for all – requires schools/centres which welcome and respond to the diversity of all children and young people (MacArthur & Rutherford, 2016) the language of ‘special education’ continues to serve as a barrier (MacArthur & Rutherford, 2016; Rutherford, 2016). This language risks homogenising and marginalising some students, and disempowering teachers who then worry they do not have the time, skill or resources to support *all* children and young people.

Conscious of this, I choose the terms ‘children and young people with diverse learning needs’ (or ‘diverse learners’ for readability) to reflect the view that all children and young people are unique in ways we can celebrate; society should be designed in ways that allow for the full participation of all, and that increasingly specialist teachers are working to create environments that cater for the needs of all learners rather than focusing on individual learners with individual needs.

I have also chosen this language to respect the diverse positions of my participants. Working across the continuum, from regular to special schools and in special units within schools, they had strong and varied perspectives on fair and equitable education. I have intentionally avoided the terms that would undercut their standpoints, and preserved their language choices to illuminate the ways participants position themselves in the current education context. Like Rutherford (2016), I’ve tried

to represent the participants and the children and young people in ways that “offer alternative, hopeful understandings of [those] who carry the essentially meaningless yet assumption-ridden label of special needs” (p. 128).

Lastly, although this research is situated within specialist teaching, it explores participants’ lives in ways that hopefully allow every teacher to glimpse aspects of their own lives within these narratives. The focus is on specialist teachers, of course, but in ways that are common to all teachers trying to support all children and young people in the current education context. Therefore, I have focused on all learners as one way of supporting teachers to “realise and respond respectfully to the full humanity of all of their future students, unencumbered by any shadow of specialist needs-ism/ableism” (Rutherford, 2016, p. 128).

This research began as a study of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing. These terms are unpacked in the literature, as is my growing sense that ‘authentic practice’ and ‘wellbeing’ are not quite the right terms. As a group, participants and I decided to replace ‘wellbeing’ with ‘fulfilment’, to tap into richer narratives of a satisfying and meaningful life, and to supplement our key constructs with those of stance, supports and stamina. Of note, we discuss fulfilment rather than ‘professional fulfilment’ to connote the inextricable connections between teaching and teacher’s lives.

The present study is significant in its approach and its contribution to the current body of knowledge. Studying teachers’ lives, alongside the teachers themselves, offers a nuanced understanding of the tensions they navigate in adding value to children’s lives as well as their own. The framework *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Support and Stamina* discussed in Chapter 7 offers a way forward, supporting teachers to craft lives that are both satisfying and meaningful.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This literature review summarises the context, purpose and vision of postgraduate study and professional practice in specialist education in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, it informs this study, which explores the features of teacher education and practice that best support the professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing of teachers in their current and future practice.

The literature review is divided into four sections. The first section, depicted in Table 1, outlines the education context of Aotearoa New Zealand and considers global and local influences on teaching and specialist teaching. As this study was situated within one postgraduate education programme, the Specialist Teaching programme, details of the programme are woven throughout this section. The next three sections synthesise and critique the literature on professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing, respectively, as well as the implications of this literature for teacher education providers.

There is vast and wide-ranging literature on professional identity and wellbeing in particular. For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to focus specifically on the research situated within teaching and teacher education. As the research is located within a postgraduate context, this will be the focus of the review. However, much of the literature is equally applicable across initial teacher education.

Table 1. *Teachers, specialist teachers and their contexts*

| The Specialist Teaching programme – The shared context of the study | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| Education in Aotearoa New Zealand – Local and global considerations: A vision of four pillars | Learning to do | How we frame “good teaching” |
| | Learning to be | Intensification and agency Supporting the person within the professional |
| | Learning to know | 21st Century learning Learning in online and blended spaces Situated learning Self-directed learning and lifelong learning Evidence-based practice |
| | Learning to live together | Bicultural and multicultural Shifting from special to inclusive education Communities of practice Whānau support groups |

The Specialist Teaching programme – The shared context of the study

The Specialist Teaching programme, developed in 2010 in response to a Ministry of Education request for proposals for an innovative professional preparation programme, is premised on the Blended Community of Inquiry and Interprofessional Practice (bCIIP) model developed by the programme’s overall coordinator (Mentis, 2010). The model foregrounds interprofessional and lifelong learning within a community of practice; self-directed learning and digital fluency, and the development of professional identity. It underpins a programme which has as its ultimate goal “the development of professional identities within an interprofessional field of practice in inclusive education” (Specialist Teaching Programme Handbook, 2016, p. 4).

Course competencies were constructed through extensive stakeholder consultation and an international review of literature and practice. Students self-assess their current knowledge, skills and dispositions in relation to competency, and develop

personalised learning goals which inform tailored activities designed to stretch their confidence and competence. Assessment is portfolio-based, which allows for authentic practice-based evidence of professional growth and relies heavily on reflective practice (Mentis et al., 2016).

Six key principles underpin the ST programme: professional practice; interprofessional practice; culturally responsive practice; evidence-based practice; contextualised practice, and reflective and ethical practice. Students document their growing competence in relation to these six principles and “weave their professional identity through application to their specialist area” (Mentis et al., 2016). Assessment is ipsative: students are assessed in relation to professional competencies and their performance over time. There is also a strong interprofessional emphasis, stressing the need to learn with, from and about each other by co-constructing knowledge to support children, young people, teachers and families/whānau (Qualification Review, 2015, p. 17).

The ST programme is nested within an ever-expanding community of practice. At the centre, the core team is comprised of up to fifteen Massey University and University of Canterbury teachers spread in terms of location, professional backgrounds and the philosophies that underpin their teaching. One layer out from these tertiary teachers, a group of former students and other professionals support the programme as markers, whānau group facilitators, interprofessional mentors and field advisors. This wider group ensures the currency and relevance of the programme, and serves as a bridge to practise nationally. With so many staff and support staff, as well as between 250 and 400 students each year, the programme has far reaching influence on education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A research stream runs alongside the ST programme, using pre- and post-survey data from students from each cohort. Students consistently identify the four strongest supports for their professional identity as their increased knowledge of the evidence-base; engaging in interprofessional learning and practice; space for reflective practice, and the development of their own cultural competence (Mentis et al., 2016). Students also identify the importance of composing a professional philosophy, as “being

required to do this forced them to think about their professional identity” (Mentis et al, 2016, p. 74).

Education in Aotearoa New Zealand – Local and global considerations:

A vision of four pillars

The ST programme provides a context for the present study, as participants were current part-time students studying alongside their full-time professional practice as specialist teachers. As with all tertiary education programmes, the ST programme operates within a local, national and global context, as do the teachers and teacher educators involved with the programme. Considering contemporary influences in education is useful in positioning the current research within a particular place and time. The education landscape, as outlined in the following sections, impacts specialist teachers personally as teachers themselves, shapes the teachers with whom they work, and influences the ways they can and do work with the teachers and others it is their role to support.

In 1996, The Delors Commission presented UNESCO with *Learning: The Treasure Within*. This document, commonly referred to as the Delors Report, challenges educators to rethink the *means* of education against the overall *aim* of education. Four pillars are suggested as a conceptual framework: learning to do; learning to be; learning to know and learning to live together. In preparation for the 1997 World Adult Education Conference, indigenous groups clarified what each of these pillars would mean for them:

- Learning to do – the right to develop oneself
- Learning to be – the right to identify and define oneself
- Learning to know – the right to knowledge of self
- Learning to live together – the right to be self-determining (Morrison & Vaioleti, 2011a)

These pillars serve as a useful framework for exploring current trends and tensions in education, their influence on teaching practices and the importance of dynamic and

fluid professional identities. The impact on individuals will vary, of course, as teachers are not passive recipients of policies and pressures. Rather, these pressures are mediated at the policy, school and individual layer, and teachers can indeed construct their understandings and subsequent practices in response to these pressures (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008). However, this requires a strong and conscious sense of self as a professional, or *learning to be*. Thus, a strong professional identity supports teachers to prioritise and enact the practices that achieve these highest aims but in ways that sit comfortably for them.

Navigating professional tensions is an ongoing challenge, evidenced in part by perennial difficulties with recruitment and retention of quality teachers. Alongside the emphasis on attracting new teachers to the profession, in light of stress levels and the prevalence of burnout, it is equally important to retain those currently teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Korthagen, 2004). Perhaps there is a need to reconstruct *learning to do, be, know and live together* in ways that work long-term for teachers. The following sections unpack some of the tensions faced by teachers, specialist teachers and tertiary providers and the response from the Specialist Teaching programme.

Learning to do

How we frame “good teaching”

All teachers hold beliefs about what entails good teaching and what conditions they perceive as necessary or desirable in order to properly perform their professional tasks. ‘Properly’ then means both ‘effectively’ (achieving the desired outcomes) and ‘satisfying’ to the actor. (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 756)

Society also holds views of what constitutes good teaching. Schön’s (1983) seminal work critiques pervasive technical rational approaches to education as construing what counts as knowledge in ways that marginalise reflection and other humanistic elements of teaching practice. Technical rational paradigms continue to influence the ways we frame good teaching, best practice and the need for standards (Biesta, 2010;

Florian & Graham, 2014). In England for example, major educational reforms have focused narrowly on “a tightly controlled national curriculum, national tests for pupils, school league tables, and rigorous school inspections which focus on compliance to the reforms” (Edwards, 2005, p. 175). In an American study, teachers similarly noted the bureaucratic aspects of their work, evaluations by administrators and increased standardised testing as sources of stress and vulnerability (Bullough, 2005). Although the specifics differ, teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand appear to be similarly pressured, with half of all teachers working sixteen or more hours per week outside of their formal hours (Wylie, 2007).

The global debate on what makes a good teacher may contribute to this pressure, as it de-emphasises the personal and creates a belief that the answer can be found in a set of isolated competencies (Korthagen, 2004). In response, teacher education often tightens its focus on curriculum delivery and the evaluation of teachers in relation to ‘specified observable standards’ (Edwards, 2005, p. 175). This tussle between “competency-based view[s] of teachers and an emphasis on the teacher’s self can still be found ... where policy-makers generally focus on the importance of outcomes in terms of competencies, [and] many researchers emphasise the more personal characteristics of teachers” (Korthagen, 2004, p. 79). Caught in the middle, teaching risks being reduced to sets of skills, and teachers risk becoming less student-responsive (Edwards, 2005). As an antidote to these pressures, Korthagen (2004) proposes the consideration of core qualities – internal, person-centred variables – alongside core competencies to balance technical rational notions of competence.

Kelchtermans (2015) challenges a parallel discourse in education, that of ‘best practices’. The message implied in ‘best practice’ is that what works has been determined, professionals should bring their practices into line with this practice, and not doing so would be irresponsible. The danger lies in teachers being treated as “passive executors of prescriptive practices” (p. 364) already decided by others, and being de-professionalised by the process. This stance may be problematic for diverse learners as well; adopting a “best practice” approach could slip into a ‘one-size-fits-all’ mode that disregards individual differences. Similarly, it may be associated with the uncritical view of ‘good teaching is good teaching’ in which the multiple demands of

diverse student groups are considered irrelevant to practise (Florian & Graham, 2014, p. 467).

Kelchtermans (2015) suggests an alternative approach, whereby *good examples of practice* are used in place of *examples of good practice*. In this way, top-down suggestions of what teachers should be but are not yet doing shift to mutually respectful dialogues. These dialogues can include rich descriptions of practices in context; teachers can then consider the structures and individuals involved, and interact with this information from their own lens. Considering how a practice fits within the teacher's current knowledge, skills, circumstances and beliefs allows each educator to create something sustainable and authentic.

This way the audience is not addressed as composed of passive followers, needing to be informed – or better: told – how to act. Rather the examples talk to the audience as colleagues and fellow-professionals, inviting them to think along (using the understandings and insights offered) to link the presented experiences and knowledge to their own professional context and situation. (Kelchtermans, 2015, p. 364)

The ST programme has a similar stance, embodied in its conceptualisation of evidence-based practices and teaching as inquiry. As shown in Figure 1 evidence-based practice is at the intersection of three forms of evidence: the research evidence; specialist teachers' professional wisdom, and the perspectives of the learner and team around the learner (Bourke, Holden, & Curzon, 2005; Bourke & Loveridge, 2013; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013). The specialist teacher works with others to elicit, synthesise and apply the evidence in the given situation in order to co-construct potential ways forward. Teaching as inquiry, as a pedagogical approach, supports teachers to evaluate their effectiveness through their impact on others. The three phases – gathering multi-sourced information to inform their actions (focusing inquiry); designing and implementing plans based on available evidence and desired outcomes (teaching inquiry), and evaluating the outcomes in order to inform future practice (learning inquiry) (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008) – align well with the three circles of evidence-based practice.



Figure 1. Evidence-based practice as the integration of three circles of evidence (Reprinted with permission from Bourke, Holden, & Curzon, 2005)

In both of these processes, moreover, the agency of both the teacher and specialist teacher are foregrounded. The emphasis is on determining how best to respond in the current situation, and learning from practice, rather than fidelity to predetermined practices. Both of these approaches are endorsed by the Ministry of Education as paving the way for longer-term agentic practice (Resource Teachers: Learning & Behaviour Professional Practice Toolkit, 2016).

When teaching is reduced to a set of skills, a focus on standards is presented as the next logical step. O'Connor's (2008) study took place alongside the implementation of professional standards for teachers in New South Wales, Australia. Participants frequently and spontaneously noted the tensions between technical rational pressures and their own lived experiences. By definition, competencies are created "to prescribe, define and regulate aspects of a professional role in a rationalist manner. They are not intended to recognise, affirm or deal with the more complex nature of teachers' socially situated and negotiated identities" (O'Connor, 2008, p. 119). Teachers need to live within this tension, protecting and preserving aspects of their self not recognised or valued by reductionist competencies.

For specialist teachers, the tension is even more pronounced. They typically work one layer out, co-constructing plans with the team around the child or system to achieve the team's priority outcomes. As such, they have an important influence on the ecology of the learner/system but limited direct influence over outcomes (Kelchtermans, 2009). This is a structural vulnerability of teaching, whereby teachers never have uncontested ground on which to base their decisions, do not always see the outcomes of their efforts, and never have complete influence over a situation (Kelchtermans, 2009, 2015). Static measures of effectiveness based on child outcomes are doubly ineffective for measuring the performance of specialist teachers, and dismiss the essence of a role "by nature open-ended and ill-defined ... [where the] central focus is on human encounters and the maintenance of supportive social relationships" (Collin, Paloniemi, Virtanen, & Eteläpelto, 2008, p. 192).

Learning to be

Intensification and agency

In their 2008 article, Ballet and Kelchtermans unpack Apple's 1986 'intensification thesis'. This thesis, which summarises the many ways teachers are being asked to do more with less, has influenced the dominant discourse of teachers and teaching. Teachers are believed to be working harder, completing more tasks under increased accountability measures, and with increasingly insufficient time and resources. Day, Elliot, & Kington (2005) concur, noting that teachers feel pulled from "what they regard as the essential part of their work of interacting with students" (p. 564) by the intensification and diversification of their roles, roles that require increasing administrative work and wide-ranging consultation with others. In a public address almost two decades after the Delors Report, Delors himself noted, "it is true that schools need to cope with greater demands and strike the right balance, in terms of teaching, between what is unchanging and what is changing" (Delors, 2013, p. 320). Aotearoa New Zealand research affirms the toll this takes on teachers, especially when coupled with family demands alongside the task overload in their professional roles (Palmer, Rose, Sanders, & Randle, 2012).

What is often missing from the conversation is teacher agency, defined as “choosing actions that align with their commitments and values and with their sense of who they are as professionals, and continuously evaluating the effectiveness of their actions” (Haneda & Sherman, 2016, p. 745) or more succinctly as the “ability to exert control over and give direction to one’s life” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 135). Sociocultural understandings of agency consider the interaction between the teacher and the tools, policies and practices of the setting, “the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situation” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137).

Ballet and Kelchtermans foreground teacher agency and individual/collective decision-making to position teachers differently within the scenario of intensification (2008). They draw attention to internal and external drivers for innovation and effectiveness; the mediating power of context and personal meaning-making, and the myriad ways individual teachers respond to intensification. Essentially, they explore the relational and contextualised nature of teaching, and the importance of individual and collective teacher agency in co-creating systems that best suit individuals. They also challenge pejorative connotations of intensification, noting that “not all teachers experience [intensification] as negative or inhibiting, or as de-professionalizing or de-skilling in its consequences. Teachers often (re)act to the intensified environment in creative and pro-active ways” (p. 48).

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008) deconstruct intensification to reveal the agentic possibilities for individuals. When people feel overloaded with obligations and opportunities, their values support them in determining their next steps: what becomes a priority, and what falls to the wayside (Chang, 2014). Intensification thus provides the opportunity and challenge of responding in authentic ways when “identit(ies) and value systems are at stake”; it is the feeling of being unable to adequately respond (rather than intensification itself) that undermines teacher competency, self-esteem and identity (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 48). As such, agency is “not something that people *have*, but something that people *do*” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 136) and the opportunity to act potentially reinforces our values, beliefs and identities.

Pressures on teachers come from several different places; external pressures within and outside the school, as well as self-imposed pressures in line with idealised images of 'good teachers' (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008). Specialist teachers may be influenced by concomitant pressures: remembering what they perceived to be good teaching and what wanted from specialist teachers prior to becoming one, and measuring their performance against both of those images in their new roles. They are also supporting classroom teachers and others to navigate intensification in ways that work for them.

Supporting the person within the professional

A rigid focus on standards devalues the professionalism of the individual teacher, and also the person within the professional. This devaluation is in spite of evidence that "institutional support for the person in the professional is an essential contributory factor to sustaining commitment" (Day et al., 2005, p. 572). Palmer (2007) challenges us to reconsider the separation of the person from the professional, by legitimising 'the teacher's selfhood' (p. 3) as part of our discussions of educational reform. Korthagen (2004, p. 78) suggests a way forward, distilling what he sees as the two central questions in teacher education: "(1) What are the essential qualities of a good teacher, and (2) How can we help people to become good teachers?" He urges us to consider the layered development of an individual, and to move beyond a focus solely on competencies.

A study of tertiary students in Mauritius (Gobin, Teeroovengadam, Becceea, & Teeroovengadam, 2012) affirms the need to prepare professionals holistically. These researchers explored the needs of tertiary students in relation to Maslow's hierarchy: physiological (sleep, food, shelter); safety and security; belongingness, affiliation and acceptance; esteem, and self-actualisation. They report that self-actualisation is the need felt most keenly by students, and challenge tertiary programmes to find ways to educate holistically, providing for the overall needs of the students rather than focusing narrowly on academic performance.

However, there is a parallel disconnect for teacher educators, which might be getting in the way of students getting what they need (Palmer, 2007). At the classroom level, academics have varying degrees of comfort and skill in bridging the personal and the

professional for students. Content-centred academics may not see the relevance of discussions steeped in students' personal experiences; student-centred teachers argue that students' lives must be foregrounded even at the expense of the content. What both groups might be saying is "Here are my own limits and potentials when it comes to dealing with the relation between the subject and my students' lives" (Palmer, 2007, p. 13).

Different approaches to pastoral care exemplify these uncertainties around holistic education. There is confusion around the optimal level of support for student wellbeing from the tertiary teacher's perspective, and limited literature addressing pastoral care in higher education (Laws & Fiedler, 2012). Laws and Fiedler (2012) report increased stress levels and lower occupational satisfaction among academics, and outline facets of academics' own lives that serve as barriers to supporting the wellbeing of their students. The increased pressure to research and publish alongside growing workloads adds stress (Laws & Fiedler, 2012) and inadvertently devalues teaching (Williams & Power, 2010). Distance learning decreases face-to-face interactions with students, and flexible teaching blurs the boundaries between work and other areas of academics' lives. In university cultures that privilege research over teaching, interactions with students can be seen as interfering with, rather than part of, academic staff members' core duties (Williams & Power, 2010).

Time and distance pressures aside, academics experience varying degrees of role confusion in relation to pastoral care. How much student support is enough, or too much? Who is best skilled, and best placed to provide it? Some academics avoid involvement in pastoral care "not only because they are not professionally qualified but also because of motivational conflict between their personal objectives, the expectations and objectives of their university employer, and their personal moral empathy with students" (Laws & Fiedler, 2012, p. 799). In my experience, there is pressure from the field to graduate only a truly competent workforce alongside institutional pressure to pass as many students as possible. These pressures have implications for who teacher educators support, how and how much.

Nonetheless, working with others requires an emotional connection, which may be more or less comfortable for tertiary educators (Pitama et al., 2007). Classroom teachers can struggle to incorporate caring behaviours, viewing them as detracting from pedagogical concerns (O'Connor, 2008) and this may apply to tertiary teachers as well. The sometimes limited connections between teaching staff and students, irrespective of the reasons, can be especially discouraging for Māori students and staff. The essential nature of relationship-based pedagogy is well explored by Bishop (e.g. Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, & Peter, 2012), but tertiary teachers themselves need guidance on how best to support their students, and how to create structures that cultivate positive relationships with students (Wong et al., 2005). Many specialist teachers are Māori, and every specialist teacher needs to work effectively with Māori, which elevates the importance of relationship-based, culturally responsive approaches. These approaches will look very different when used to support a person from a culture premised on collective, interdependent and whānau-based values, than with someone from culture based on individualism and independence (Bevan-Brown, 2001).

In addition to practical and ethical considerations related to pastoral care in tertiary education, there is some controversy around the unintended consequences of developing teacher wellbeing. Margolis, Hodge and Alexandrou (2014) discuss the role of teacher education in supporting the current and future wellbeing of students. Their argument builds on two dilemmas in teacher education: preparing students to work in current versus future systems, and supporting the wellbeing of individuals versus the wellbeing of systems. The authors suggest that resistance is a necessary counterpart of resilience, and we need to effectively bolster both of these stances in our teachers pre-service and in-service.

Collin et al. identify a similar need for what they call 'fight back strategies' (2008, p. 202) to minimise or remove workplace barriers to ongoing learning, networking and developing one's professional identity. These strategies include creating personally meaningful activities within one's professional role, growing relationships and engaging in new and different communities of practice. "Maintaining of good relations between people practising close to each other functions as a compensatory force

against the more superficial constraints on work and learning” (p. 202). They also note the importance of doing work that fits with one’s image of good work, in order to maintain professional pride, “hanging onto the principles of a job well done even if this was hampered by lack of time and other resources sometimes” (p. 203). Lastly, they advocated for complementing a robust life inside of work with an equally robust life outside of work. At times, they believe it necessary to separate rather than integrate one’s personal and professional roles and personal and professional life.

“Distinguishing one’s professional from one’s personal identity and thus giving more value to other areas of life can be seen as a compensatory strategy in coping with work-related stress encountered at work” (p. 203).

In teacher education, there is always a dilemma in the extent to which we bolster resilience and resistance. Preparing teachers to adapt to the current educational context – resilience – could be good for their wellbeing in the short term, but maintain status quo in the educational setting. Preparing teachers to challenge the current context – resistance – can be difficult in the short-term but good for the individual and context long term (Margolis et al., 2014). Herein lies the delicate balance between practice, identity and wellbeing.

Learning to know

21st Century learning

Teaching and learning, including teacher education, have changed in recent years. 21st Century learning and teaching is increasingly premised on principles of personalised learning that occurs with others and in context; evolving understandings of inclusion and diversity; and a culture of self-directed, inquiry-based and lifelong learning (Bolstad, Gilbert, & McDowall, 2012). What counts as knowledge has shifted to encompass the collective views, intuitions and beliefs of participants (Dede, 2008, in Li, 2012). In keeping with these changes, there is never ‘one right answer’, and an increased need to co-author understandings with students.

These changes begin to address criticisms of the current system, and the ways it consistently under-serves Māori and Pacific Island students (Morrison & Vaoleti, 2011a). “Not only does policy need to improve but so do the way the schools and

universities and learning institutions respond to students and pedagogical practises also need to incorporate Māori and Pacific thinking” (p. 404).

Culturally responsive and contemporary approaches to learning and teaching converge in emancipatory pedagogies, or “teaching that seeks to free people from the limitations of injustices” (Duncan-Andrade, 2008, p. 3). Duncan-Andrade (2008) summarises the key elements of emancipatory pedagogy as supporting students to:

- Engage – culturally authentic teaching that affirms and draws on students’ own lived experiences and sources of knowledge
- Experience – broadens students’ realities by sharing the perspectives of those often marginalised by the dominant discourse
- Empower – through critical, transformative pedagogies, engender agency in students to act on their own lives individually and collectively
- Enact – construct genuine opportunities for students to employ their increasing agency, through cycles of learning, doing and reflecting.

At the tertiary level, in this more relational approach to postgraduate training, successful completion of a university degree is no longer viewed solely as the responsibility of the student. Institutions are beginning to view degree completion as a shared responsibility between students and programme staff, and are responding, for instance, by establishing mentoring schemes (Rogers, 2009). However, it is important to consider these huge shifts in practice and how they influence the professional identities of teachers in both schools and tertiary contexts. If a teacher is no longer the ‘expert’, and can no longer teach by transmitting knowledge to students, then who are they (Korthagen, 2004)?

Maher and Macallister (2013) catalogue the supports enabling a higher than average number of students to successfully complete their initial teacher education course. Students, graduates and programme staff identify the following enablers to student success: individual intake interviews; a dean of pastoral care; access to instructors, course coordinators and peer mentors; senior instructors teaching incoming students; smaller class sizes; and comprehensive levels of support for all students, including

classes scaffolding reflective practice. Practising *tuakana teina* (where more experienced students work with less experienced students, akin to peer mentoring) also has been shown to be effective in engaging and retaining distance students (Boyle, Kwon, Ross & Simpson, 2010, in Rawlings & Wilson, 2013).

The ST programme begins with a three-day on-campus block course where considerable time is spent developing relationships, and competence and confidence with the two online learning platforms. Within and beyond the block course, opportunities are built into the forums to build relationships with both tertiary teachers and peers. Students also have smaller online forums, and *whānau* groups which serve as local, face-to-face communities of practice concerned with students as people as well as students/professionals. Participation in the online site is monitored and digital badging is used to track progress. Students who have not been online, or are late in receiving their digital badge, are contacted and individual support plans are crafted as needed. I serve as the dedicated coordinator of Networks and Wellbeing, with student support as a large part of my core duties. As such, I coordinate whānau groups and extensions, and support students who require additional support.

Learning in online and blended spaces

Hartnett (2015) notes the multifaceted ways online learning has enhanced tertiary education, for example supporting study from a distance and in times and places that are convenient for the individual. However, online learning requires discipline and motivation. Students who are confident and competent in their learning become efficient, effective and self-directed learners with *tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination) (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013). Using Ryan and Deci's (2000) macro framework for understanding key aspects of motivation, Hartnett (2015) explores learners' motivation, or self-determination, in online spaces in terms of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy encompasses our perceived control, and choice, over our actions. Competence requires a sense of effectiveness, and relatedness reflects our connectedness to others. She identifies the following barriers to autonomy: workload; weighting of assessments; relevance; course expectations and controlling language; time and technology constraints; limited choice; inequity in workload, and insufficient input into group tasks and decision-making. Competence

can also be undermined in online environments through unclear guidelines; limited guidance or feedback; perceptions of low efficacy; reductions in teacher input; resources that do not seem useful, and challenges pitched too high for the student. Lastly, the sense of relatedness in online environments can be negatively impacted by communication issues, disharmony and limited opportunities to interact outside of one's small workgroup (Hartnett, 2015).

Several of these influences have particular relevance to the ST programme. As noted earlier, students are typically working full-time in professional roles that are new to them; thus, high workloads and time constraints can be significant. Many of the students completed their initial degrees more traditionally, full-time on campus for three years. For these students in particular, the learning curve and self-efficacy required for self-directed, online learning can be huge barriers.

Dominant discourses can be disparaging of instructor-student and student-student relationships in online environments. Norman (2014) counters that teaching online requires more rather than less from tertiary teachers in terms of engagement, communication and feedback. Done well, they are strenuous to build and to facilitate.

When faculty build online courses that foster meaningful engagement, they often find the experience deeply satisfying. I've worked with faculty who feel *more* connected to their students in online courses than in their face-to-face courses. And I've heard students say the same. The trick is creating these connections over geographical distance. And that requires excellent tools, excellent pedagogy, *and* institutional incentives that make it worthwhile for faculty to invest the necessary time and energy. (Norman, 2014, para. 5)

A report on the Tuakana-Teina e-Belonging project at the Open Polytechnic affirmed that it is possible, and essential, to cultivate what they call "*whakawhanaungatanga* [building of relationships] in cyberspace. It is a 'space' for Māori, by Māori, with Māori, and an opportunity for Māori learners to 'be' Māori" (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 6).

Situated learning

Akin to blending learning in education, workspaces have also changed considerably in recent years. Both can now be done remotely, as people increasingly engage with colleagues asynchronously through online environments. Professional development has changed as well; online learning allows busy professionals to fit study around other aspects of their lives, and in times and spaces that work for them. There has been a similar shift in workplaces, with employees working from home and working hours that suit them rather than the organisation.

Collin et al. (2008) outline some of the unintended consequences of these shifts, such as a diminished sense of collective identity within an organisation, and fewer informal and spontaneous opportunities to learn from others in the community of practice. They note the negative impact of working when and where is most convenient/productive on the development workplace identities.

What may be missing in modern workplaces is increasingly present in contemporary tertiary experiences. Teacher educators increasingly value situated learning experiences, including practica where students learn and apply the skills in real-life contexts. Situated learning provides teachers with the context, if not always the scaffolding, for developing what Ballet and Kelchtermans (2002) term 'micropolitical literacy'. In any organisation, there are issues of power and influence; navigating these tensions "constitutes an important dimension in teachers' professional development and needs to be included in any appropriate theory on teacher development" (p. 756).

Distilling the themes from one teacher's early experiences, these authors identify key dichotomies in teaching practice and their link to professional identity and micropolitical literacy. The tension between taking initiative and relying on others, for example, requires understandings of structural power. Teaching always requires a balance of distance and commitment, and professionals who can compensate for negative experiences (2002). O'Connor's (2008) work further exemplifies the need to negotiate distance versus commitment in her study of caring behaviours in three secondary teachers. Her participants also grappled with the tensions between building relationships whilst maintaining professional boundaries and distance, and

constructing their caring behaviours in consideration of the values and practices in their building that might enable or constrain their behaviours.

Kelchtermans and Ballet's (2002) in-depth study of one teacher's journey also illustrates the move from peripheral to more central participation – in this case, speaking out at a staff meeting – in terms of how we grow in professional identity within our communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Little is known about the ways these situated opportunities are changed by the nature of contemporary workplaces. Specifically, it may be important to explore the ways students are learning informally from their colleagues, when contact is limited as their colleagues are working from home.

The ST programme is unique in the way it complements the Aotearoa New Zealand education context. Students are geographically spread throughout the country, studying alongside employment in a range of educational settings. Blended learning allows for the flexibility and accessibility required by a geographically diverse workforce, as well as the face-to-face contact essential for whakawhanaungatanga (relationship-building). Integrating work and study reduces the gap new teachers can face after full-time teacher education training, and then 'being lost' and ill-prepared to reconcile university teachings with practical realities (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 225). The blended nature of the programme also allows students to enact new learning in their new settings with the scaffolding and support of peers on the course.

Self-directed learning and lifelong learning

The late-modern age is one of globalisation; rapid innovation and technology; international travel and migration, and the loss of community, all of which require people who can cope with change, effect change within themselves and adopt new identities (Tedder, 2009). Working effectively in an inclusive education context requires many of the same dispositions, as educators continually reinvent their practices in order to minimise the barriers to full participation for all learners. As a journey rather than destination, "inclusive pedagogy [is] an aspect of teacher professional knowledge which begins with initial teacher education and continues throughout the teacher's career" (Florian & Graham, 2014, p. 466). Disley (2009)

concur, noting that the teachers are more likely to create non-disabling contexts when they care for every student, embrace diversity and difference, reflect on their practice and the difference they are making, and stay open to new learning

Self-directed and lifelong learning hark back to Dewey, who believed that the primary aim of education was growth, but without educators specifying the extent or direction of growth (Noddings, 2012).

Many teachers asked, Growth toward what? Dewey insisted that growth is its own end; that is, to ask 'growth toward what?' is inconsistent with the concept of growth. Growth tends toward more growth, he said, and we must not make the concept rigid by specifying its direction. (Noddings, 2012, p. 26)

Dewey did however identify the conditions of growth – namely that it develops connections – and emphasised the need to include students in co-constructing the nature and direction of their learning. “Dewey insisted that not only teachers must have aims for their chosen activities; students must be involved in settling objectives for their own learning” (Noddings, 2012, p. 28). They can do this most effectively when their prior knowledge is considered, honoured, and built on by teachers who consider their students’ past experiences, current and future learning needs (Noddings, 2012).

However, these ideas may not reflect the typical stance of students within economic models of education, where the relationship between students and universities is often framed as an economic exchange (O’Toole & Prince, 2015). In their study of teachers at the end of their education in Sweden, Abrandt Dahlgren and Hammar Chiriac (2009) found few students taking personal responsibility for their own learning, for example by connecting themselves as individuals to the course content and driving their own development. In contrast, “the dominating pattern is that to become a teacher, the student needs to fulfil the requirements of the assignments and tasks designed by the course convenors” (p. 995).

The ST programme creates a climate of experiential learning, where students learn through cycles of action and reflection, gaining knowledge and skills, along with self-

understanding (Schön, 1983). Students have access to a carefully-selected 'smorgasbord' of content and learning activities. After setting learning goals based on self-analysis of individual and contextual needs, in relation to course competencies, each student designs their own learning plan and draws from the content and activities most relevant to them. "This self-directed and inquiry-based learning is central to the programme as it allows for differentiated, relevant and meaningful learning and engagement" (Mentis et al., 2016, p. 68).

The programme's constructivist pedagogy is underpinned by Marlowe and Page's (2005) four key tenets:

1. Learning involves constructing, rather than receiving, knowledge;
2. Understanding and applying knowledge are more important than recalling information;
3. Thinking and analysing are more important than amassing facts; and
4. Learners are active rather than passive.

Taking charge of their own personalised curriculum ensures students' learning is always appropriate, authentic and contextualised. Through self-directed learning, they develop professional wisdom and the skills they need in managing intensification and other practice dilemmas. They also shift away from rules-based decision making, which is predicated on external and predetermined guidance and has obvious limitations in a constantly shifting education context. Principles-based decision making, by contrast, fortifies professionals for lifelong learning and adaptive practice, and gives them the competence and confidence to practise effectively in evolving contexts (Mentis et al., 2016). This rationale is consistent with Derrida (2003, in Murray, Holmes, Perron, & Rail, 2008) who believes "There are ethics precisely because ... there *is* no rule. There are ethics because I have to *invent* the rule; and there would be no responsibility if I knew the rule. ... That's where responsibility starts, when I *don't* know what to do" (p. 685). As such, self-directed and lifelong learning may serve as a buffers for intensification, engendering professionals who negotiate the demands on their practice in ways that serve their others and themselves.

Evidence-based practice

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is premised on the importance of identifying interventions most likely to be successful in a given situation. Biesta affirms the intuitive appeal of evidence as part of professional practice, but cautions against a ‘what works’ approach in education (2010). “There is no easy ‘what works’ answer for teachers: ‘what works’ depends on the context. This means that it is important to also understand why, for whom, and in what circumstances a particular teaching approach is effective” (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 52). This emphasis on the contextualised nature of evidence-based practice sits comfortably with Kelchtermans’ (2015) challenge to shift to *good examples of practice*, as both create space for educators to reflect on and adapt evidence-based practices to fit within their contexts.

Historically, however, the *why*, *where* and *for whom* have been side-lined by narrow measures of ‘what counts’ as evidence; certain sources of evidence have been privileged whilst others are dismissed. When ‘evidence’ is reduced to scientific knowledge, narrowed to that gathered through scientific research, and narrowed again to experimental research, the search for ‘what works’ reduces rather than embraces complexity (Biesta, 2010). The differing histories, voices and needs of different groups are erased in the search for common tendency. From a cultural standpoint, grass-roots programmes not considered evidence-based from a western perspective are devalued; whilst organisations continue to fund, mandate and implement programmes with a western evidence base that remain unsuitable for Māori (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013). *Evidence-based* and *effective* are therefore not automatically synonymous, especially when the evidence is constructed solely within dominant and monocultural worldviews (Macfarlane and Macfarlane, 2013).

In her study of special education, Bevan-Brown noted that the resulting services “are generally designed, delivered and evaluated by people from the majority culture and are usually based on a majority culture concept of special needs” (Bevan-Brown, 2001, p. 145). Unique, and critical, aspects of the child, family and context are lost. There has been a parallel tradition of dismissing children’s voices, doing *to* children rather than *with* children. In her critique of the implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Lundy (2007) argues that children’s

legal right to space, voice, audience and influence have been largely ignored. Going forward, both groups must be given opportunities and support to express their views; be listened to and heard, and see their perspectives reflected in the actions of those around them (Holley-Boen, Graham & Harre, 2016; Lundy, 2007).

In education, to expand the voices considered as part of 'what counts', more holistic evidence-based practice (EBP) frameworks have been developed. As mentioned previously, EBP is increasingly conceptualised as the integration of three circles of evidence: the research evidence, the professional wisdom of the practitioner, and the team around the learner (Bourke, Curzon & Holden, 2005; Bourke & Loveridge, 2013; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013). This expanded approach to EBP stays true to the scientist-practitioner model's core principle of learning through both research and practice, but draws more systematically on culture and context, professional wisdom and the voices of everyone involved (Bourke & Loveridge, 2013).

These three sources of evidence are sufficient only when they are situated within a cultural context sourced beyond dominant worldviews (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013). Specifically, these authors maintain that *research evidence* must search beyond peer-reviewed journals and so forth to include unpublished, enduring Māori knowledge. *Professional wisdom* must include cultural competency. And the circle drawing on the learner and the team around the learner must not stop at information gathering, but work to cultivate relationships and the genuine participation of children, families and whānau.

As such a complex framework, synthesising different evidence in every situation, EBP requires layered knowledge and skills. The professional must know how to identify relevant questions, ones which inform the process and whose answers are most likely to contribute constructively to the referral situation (Bourke & Loveridge, 2013). They must also know how to elicit evidence from each circle, in relation to the situation being considered, and to synthesise and apply the information to the current situation.

Critical to the process is the legitimate involvement of children and young people, families/whānau, teachers and other professionals. With Māori families/whānau, this may involve relationship-building and collaboration with a much bigger group, as key

extended family members are included in the process (Bevan-Brown, 2001). Working with so many, to discover so much, the evidence-based professional is charged with making “decisions such as *how* to include young learners [and whānau], *what* pedagogical and pastoral support is required, and *who* initiates and sustains elements of change” (Bourke & Loveridge, 2013, p. 6). The risk in this approach, however, is of perpetuating an expert model whereby the decision-making and power continue to lie with the professional.

When collaboration is based in the genuine co-construction of knowledge and equal distribution of power (Glynn, 2015) the professional’s role shifts to developing and sustaining the individual and collective values of the group, redressing issues of power, and determining the specific role evidence should play in each situation. Paradoxically, teachers must do this in a climate in which “a particular use of evidence threatens to replace professional judgement” (Biesta, 2010, p. 492). They must also understand how to systematically draw from their own craft knowledge, reflective practice and intuition (Florian & Graham, 2014). The present study seeks to add detail to this aspect of the literature in particular, exploring the ongoing learning and development of the professional as they develop both the rigour and artistry of their practice (Bourke & Loveridge, 2013). This line of thinking is especially useful in inclusive education, as the idea of ‘craft knowledge’ (Cooper & McIntyre, 1995; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) shifts the conversation from teachers not having the specialist knowledge to meet the additional needs of diverse learners to honouring the complexity of their skills and knowledge, reflection and problem solving (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Learning to live together

Bicultural and multicultural

Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) is a partnership agreement signed in 1840 by various Māori Chiefs and the British Crown. Although signed in 1840, the Treaty was “largely ignored” until the 1970s (Lourie, 2016, p. 639). A focus on biculturalism, defined as the political and social partnership of two ethnically different peoples, was established in 1984 to replace previous monocultural policies focused on separatism, assimilation and integration of Māori (Durie, 2011; Lourie, 2016). In Aotearoa New

Zealand, in accordance with the Treaty, professional practice should be prioritised firstly in terms of bicultural obligations and then as part of multicultural responsibilities.

Some attribute ongoing inequities in the education system to Aotearoa New Zealand's long-standing sense of itself as egalitarian and meritocratic. They argue that these ideals, still reflected in the current system, have "served in the main to perpetuate economic and social disparities that were an inherent part of the colonising process" (Seve-Williams, 2013, p. 246).

Many New Zealanders still believe that an individual's ability to be successful is based on their merits, generally viewed as a combination of factors including innate abilities, working hard, having the right attitude, and having high moral character and integrity. Aotearoa New Zealanders not only tend to *think* that is the way the system should work, but most actually accept uncritically that this is how it does work. (Seve-Williams, 2013, p. 244)

This viewpoint has implications for specialist teachers, as their work centres on groups that are marginalised within the current system. As Māori learners are consistently overrepresented in negative achievement statistics, the obligation to get it right for Māori cannot be overstated; representing cultural ways of knowing in the education system is key to this (Bishop et al., 2012; Bishop, 2003). Morrison and Vaoletti (2011a) link the absence of Māori and Pacific cultural and contextual knowledge within western education models to "Māori and Pacific learners [leaving] the formal sector unprepared to live in their own communities" (p. 401). As specialist teachers assess, analyse and develop programmes to support the needs of Māori learners, there is a growing expectation to develop their appreciation and understanding of Māori knowledge, values and philosophies in order to respond in culturally authentic ways (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013).

A strong example of a biculturally responsive approach can be seen in Durie's *Te Whare Tapa Wha* model (1985). The model challenged the belief that health was a universal concept, and offered an alternative to western approaches that excluded and

pathologised Māori (Durie, 2011). As a holistic, integrated framework, Te Whare Tapa Wha expands notions of health to include the spiritual (te taha wairua); psychological and emotional (te taha hinengaro); physical (te taha tinana) and family/whānau (te taha whānau) (Durie, 1985, 2011). Looking back, Durie notes the impact Te Whare Tapa Wha had on the system by giving Māori an active and distinctive voice and resulting in an ecological approach to health that met the needs of Māori and non-Māori (Durie, 2011).

Current research in education offers a way forward as well. Summarising key findings across three Māori educational research projects, Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito and Bateman (2008) note the essential nature of “relationships, connectedness, academic engagement, supportive environments and acknowledgment and recognition of difference (as) key qualities that make teaching and learning more meaningful for Māori students and indeed for all students” (p. 113). One project in particular, Achievement in Multicultural High Schools, showed “that in a caring environment, students felt safe and were more likely to contribute, to take risks and to manifest interest and enjoyment in their learning activities” (p. 114).

Constructing these spaces requires student-teacher collaboration; holistic approaches to collective learning; shared ownership of learning activities (Bishop et al., 2012) and authentic, place-based learning (Penetito, 2009). This occurs in constructivist classrooms, where deep learning takes place because teachers position students as autonomous and responsible learners; provide students with opportunities to do things differently, and co-create environments where “students are allowed to be who and what they are” (Macfarlane et al., 2008, p.116).

Indigenous perspectives on holistic and lifelong learning provide interesting insights in this regard. Vaioleti and Vaioleti (2003, in Morrison & Vaioleti, 2011b) bring a Māori and Pacific Island lens to lifelong learning in their discussion of *ako*. *Ako* – one Polynesian word connoting both to learn and to teach – has a more holistic and community-centred connotation than do typical western notions of lifelong learning.

It is driven by cultural, spiritual as well as collective concepts, motivations and aspirations with *ako* starting well before a child is born and continues

until s/he dies. Ako involves training, learning, doing, observing, practising, reflecting, consulting and visioning and hope. (Morrison & Vaioleti, 2011b, p. 396)

Individual learning is seen as valuable only to the extent it contributes to the collective. Ako reinforces the roles of individuals within a collective, situates learning as valuable for wellbeing, and broadens ideas of learning to incorporate formal and incidental, modelling and practising (Morrison & Vaioleti, 2011b, p. 397). Lifelong learning is about the development of individuals and the community, rather than a means to an end in an economic system: “One can say then that beneficial service to family and the community is the aim of ako” (Morrison & Vaioleti, 2011b, p. 397).

The four pillars put forward in the Delors Report (1996) advance culturally responsive pedagogies as well, as they combat arbitrary boundaries put around learning, considering the *where* of the learning as well as the *who*. The authors reject fixed ideas that *learning to know* would happen through formal schooling, *learning to do* would occur in the workplace; that *learning to be* would be a private endeavour and *learning to live together* a public one. Instead, “these four pillars are inextricably linked. We must not favour one particular goal over another in education” (p. 321).

Shifting from special to inclusive education

Contemporary definitions of inclusive education emphasise rights over needs, and charge schools/centres with responding to the diversity of all children and young people in ways that are equitable and welcoming (MacArthur & Rutherford, 2016). Aotearoa New Zealand is held up by some as having one of the most inclusive education systems in the world, with fewer than one percent of learners educated outside of the regular classroom (in special classes, special units within the regular school, or in special schools) (Hornby, 2012). Hornby (2012) attributes this to radical policies, which aim for every child to have access to their local school, and limited statutory requirements on practice. However, MacArthur and Rutherford (2016) argue that Ministry of Education policies are still premised on neoliberal beliefs and an ideology of special needs in ways that negatively impact the lives of children and young people.

The New Zealand Education Act was passed in 1987, guaranteeing all children between five and nineteen a free education at any state-funded school; a few years later, in 1993, Aotearoa New Zealand passed the Human Rights Act which reaffirmed the rights of individuals and prohibited discrimination including exclusion from regular education (Moore, 1999). Special Education 2000 (SE2000) policy was introduced in 1998; with an underlying premise of inclusion, and the introduction of the Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour (RTLB). Specialist teachers, including RTLB, are seen as contributing to the MoE's vision of "a world-leading education system that equips all Aotearoa New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century" (RTLB Toolkit, 2016).

The vision of SE2000 was non-categorical, needs-based support for all learners; equal scrutiny of the child and environment in order to ensure a 'goodness of fit', and a belief that the barriers children with learning and behaviour needs face are external, not internal (Moore, 1999). Educational environments – including spaces, instruction and curriculum – would "reduce exclusion to its irreducible minimum, because those environments now permit the maximum level of inclusion" (p. 11). To fulfil this vision, schools would take responsibility for every learner; teachers would have the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to meet the needs of all learners, and the specialist teaching workforce would be "skilled, coordinated, evidence based and forward thinking" (Disley, 2009, p. 63). RTLB, for instance, are charged with working alongside teachers to identify solutions that support students with significant barriers to their learning, build teacher capability and further the inclusive practices of schools (RTLB Toolkit, 2016).

Yet, almost two decades later, teachers globally continue to report feeling underprepared for the demands of inclusive education (Florian & Graham, 2014). Whilst many are supportive in theory, Aotearoa New Zealand teachers struggle to balance the needs of every child in their classroom; fulfil administrative requirements and cope with large class sizes and increasing behaviour challenges (Wylie, 2007). As recently as 2016, Rutherford catalogued long-standing markers of difference which still exist in schools, including separate spaces; special staff; labels; social relationships limited to assigned 'buddies' and teacher aides; bullying; lowered expectations; and

persisting barriers to access and participation in an academic curriculum. Sadly, schools worry that working effectively with students identified as having special education needs would have the ‘magnet school’ effect of attracting more students than they have the capacity to support effectively (Disley, 2009).

At the time of SE2000’s introduction, and arguably still today, Moore et al. identified two competing paradigms in education in Aotearoa New Zealand (1999). In the *functional limitations paradigm*, groups of students are seen as unable to benefit from regular instruction; diagnosed and categorised according to deficits, and given instruction focused on remediation. Focusing on including all learners within the regular classroom is insufficient, as “mainstreaming simply relocated the attitudes, special materials, special curricula and teaching techniques of special education to the regular classroom” (p. 5). Fundamentally, the child is still seen as needing to fit the classroom, rather than the classroom fitting the needs of the child.

As recently as 2016, MacArthur and Rutherford argue that a significant barrier to genuine transformation of policies and practices in Aotearoa New Zealand’s education system is the continued framing of some students and teachers as ‘special’ (MacArthur & Rutherford, 2016; Rutherford, 2016). The ideology of special education perpetuates the belief that groups of children and young people need more time and resources, may disrupt the learning of others, and require specialist input. More disheartening, it lead teachers to believe they don’t have the necessary training to work with certain learners (Lalvani, 2013, in Rutherford, 2016).

In the competing paradigm, the *ecological paradigm*, the focus is on the interaction between diverse learners and the layers of their environments (p. 4). In this sociocultural perspective of learning, individual difference is viewed as natural, to be expected, and a result of interactions between learners and various environments rather than a reflection of fixed, within-learner traits (Florian & Graham, 2014). Teaching can then be framed as “extending what is generally available to everyone (as opposed to providing for all by differentiating for some) while taking into account that there will be differences between learners” (p. 465).

Florian and Graham (2014) argue that teachers are continually considering and adapting their teaching to individual learners; it is only when the teacher comes up against the limits of their skills, knowledge and confidence that learners are framed as having 'special needs'.

Thus, inclusive classrooms depend on teachers who are able to exercise their professional judgements sensitively in support of the learning of everyone, while simultaneously making sense of multifaceted social and practical situations that include responding to individual difference between students and working collaboratively with other adults. ... Such judgements involve a deliberate decision-making process that actively avoids practices that may mark some students as different or less able. (Florian & Graham, 2014, p. 468)

These competing paradigms are particularly relevant to this study: specialist teachers are influenced by their own beliefs as teachers, and tasked with supporting teachers with varying attitudes to work more effectively with all children.

Communities of practice

Abrandt Dahlgren and Hammar Chiriac (2009) put forward two purposes of collaboration: to work together in mutual pursuit of outcomes, and to learn about working together as an end in itself. Palmer (2007, p. 79) reinforces this idea, emphasising that learning "demands community – a dialogical exchange in which our ignorance can be aired, our ideas tested, our biases challenged, and our knowledge expanded, an exchange in which we are not simply left alone to think our own thoughts". He notes that, alongside examination of a teacher's 'inner terrain' (p. 5) we must also look for the 'outer forms of community that teaching and learning require. The inward quest for communion becomes a quest for outward relationship: at home in our own souls, we become more at home with each other" (p. 5).

A framework for collaborative learning comes from the communities of practice (CoP) literature, which defines CoP as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

CoP have three consistent elements: a domain (the head); the community (the heart), and a focus on practice (the hands) (Wenger et al., 2002). The idea of head, heart and hands resonates with Māori pedagogies, which address the holistic needs of learners by educating for *hinengaro* (intellect, or head and heart), *wairua* (spirituality or soul) and *tinana* (body) (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

Wenger describes CoP as “a dynamic, two-way relationship between people and the social learning systems in which they participate” (2000, p. 227). There is a continual and reciprocal process of individual learning and development and the reshaping of workplace practices and cultures (Collin et al., 2008, p. 193). In a genuine CoP, participants find an intrinsic value in their connections which informally binds them to the group. Their ongoing engagement in the community yields common practices, knowledge and a unique collective perspective on their area of practice. CoP can develop personal and professional relationships, shared norms and both individual and group identities (Wenger et al., 2002). Again, these ideas fit well for Māori learners in blended learning environments, who “need not to be isolated from the institution, their teachers or other students. The need for a sense of connection, belonging and community is a strong value” (Ross, 2008, in Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 4).

In their study of workplace learning and identity formation, Collin et al. (2008) identify social support as the greatest enabler, and lack of support as the greatest barrier. These authors stipulate the need for what they term a sense of ‘we-ness’ – which encapsulates competence, emotional solidarity and agency – and is contingent on active engagement in the community. “This implies that the lack of active membership acts as a serious constraint not only on social togetherness but also on learning at work” (p. 205). The authors note that working together, feeling valued and having opportunities to gain information – all of which happen naturally in CoP – enable learning and identity. For Māori learners in particular, online environments that replicate the values, principles and beliefs inherent in Māori pedagogies enable students to have a sense of connection to the programme and a sense of belonging within the learning context (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013).

Morrison and Vaioleti (2011) stretch our conceptualisation of what counts as a CoP as they argue that education is not the sole responsibility of the formal system; learning also occurs in homes, churches and cultural centres as well. Acknowledging these non-formal learning opportunities broadens our understanding of where and how learning takes place and legitimises the many and varied CoP in which each of us engages as part of our education.

Barriers to sharing knowledge in CoP include limited time and trust, climates that are not conducive to creating shared understandings, and messages from management regarding the sharing of knowledge; this is especially true for tacit knowledge (Collin et al., 2008). These barriers underscore Wenger et al.'s (2002) assertion that the health of CoP depends on voluntary and informal membership; naturally evolving leadership; and autonomy in setting the purpose and direction. There are implications for teacher educators then: CoP can be created and encouraged, but engagement cannot become a mandatory part of the training.

To collaborate effectively within and across communities of practice, professionals must actively break down the barriers between professionals practising in different areas and by working in ways that intentionally disrupt silos of practice and knowledge (Mentis et al., 2016). The ST programme has as its mantra *learning with, from and about* to represent the ways interprofessional learning strengthens interprofessional practice, which is seen as “key to providing collaborative communities for integrated inclusive education practices” (Mentis et al., 2016, p. 67). Students in the programme “valued others within and across specialist areas as a source of learning, alongside the formal course content. Learning together resulted in increased confidence and competence to practise more effectively together” (p. 74).

A parallel body of knowledge on tertiary education emphasises students’ “need to feel valued and part of a supportive learning community, which extends beyond the lecture theatre” (Maher & Macallister, 2013, p. 63). Noble and Henderson (2011, in Maher & Macallister, 2013) note the distinct importance of quality interactions with tertiary teachers and fellow students in informal contexts. These interactions increase students’ sense of belonging. Additionally, students are more likely to seek help from

an instructor they have a relationship with, which leads to higher success rates for the programme as a whole (Maher & Macallister, 2013).

Whānau support groups

Within the Specialist Teaching programme, and as noted earlier, an infrastructure for communities of practice has been developed according to the tenets put forth by Wenger et al. (2002) and the principles of biculturally responsive practice (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Students are invited to participate in these local, face-to-face groups focused on the sharing of interprofessional knowledge and skills as well as pastoral care. These groups are called *whānau* (family) support groups, to connote naturally forming groups where individual member take on positions and “fulfil different functions oriented towards the collaborative concerns, interests and benefits of the *whānau* as a group, rather than towards the benefit of any one member” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p. 172).

These groups serve three purposes: the face-to-face complement to online interactions in a blended learning style postgraduate course; a formal support for the wellbeing of students, and a place to grow future, local, interprofessional communities of practice. Alongside the face-to-face gatherings, students have access to private online forums with membership from their *whānau* group. For Māori and Pacific Island students, who have a dedicated forum as well, the forums have the potential to serve as what Greenwood and Te Aika coined “a ‘virtual *marae*’ – a space where Māori values operate for peer mentoring activity to support Māori distance learners in their study” (2008, in Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 4).

Like other communities of practice, the value and health of *whānau* support groups rests on their continued voluntary nature and “ecology of leadership” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 36). They are established, valued, and supported from the outside (by teaching staff), but each group is encouraged to construct their own specific practices, rhythms and foci. They vary in how often they meet, the method and frequency of communication between meetings and what a typical meeting looks like. What they all have in common is the valuing of collective and “embodied expertise – a deep

understanding of complex, interdependent systems that enables dynamic responses to context-specific problems” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 13)

Whānau groups embody *psychological contracting*, a complex way of understanding the dynamic and reciprocal ways students shape their relationships with tertiary teachers and enact their own sense of obligation (O’Toole & Prince, 2015). This expectation of reciprocity is commonly seen in tertiary programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand, possibly due to the influence of *Te Ao Māori* (Māori worldview). Collective understandings and expectations are influenced by notions of *ako* and *tuakana teina*. Collective expectations are also influenced by Māori pedagogies, whereby knowledge and skills are seen as valuable only to the extent they contribute back to the community (Macfarlane et al., 2008). The community of practice literature also explains this goodwill or social capital, whereby people give to a community with the understanding that they will benefit, in some way, in the future. “This kind of reciprocity is neither selflessness nor simple tit for tat, but a deeper understanding of mutual value that extends over time” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 37). Students in the Specialist Teaching programme often come with a sense of obligation to their fellow students, to the members of their whānau support group, and to the children and families/whānau whom they support.

Professional identity

As shown in Table 2, the next section reviews the literature on professional identity, then authentic practice and wellbeing. It begins by establishing professional identity as an essential aspect of professional practice, a compass for decision-making in complex contemporary education contexts. Seminal research on professional identity is summarised and implications for teacher educators are considered.

Table 2. Review of the literature on professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing

| | |
|---|--|
| Professional identity | Professional identity and ideas on 'self' Seminal research on professional identity in teacher education Considerations in scaffolding professional identity Implications for teacher educators |
| Authentic practice | A case for authentic practice Understandings of authentic practice Constructivist approaches Navigating barriers to authentic practice in the field Implications for teacher educators |
| Wellbeing | Historical understandings Contemporary understandings and the influence of positive psychology Teacher wellbeing and the links to learning Implications for teacher educators Moving away from 'wellbeing' |
| Research connecting professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing | |

There is an absence of agreed upon definitions of teacher identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Hsieh, 2015). However, in their meta-analysis of existing research on professional identity, Beijaard et al. (2004) identified four key features:

1. Professional identity is an ongoing process of interpretation
2. Professional identity implies both person and context
3. Professional identity consists of multiple identities
4. Professionals must be active in the process of developing professional identity.

Postmodern understandings frame identity as fluid, multiple and with multiple facets, socially and culturally contextualised, relational and "continually under construction" (Tedder, 2009, p. 4). The growing movement around teacher accountability has spurred increased interest in teachers' influence on student outcomes, the training and retention of effective teachers, and teachers' professional identity (Hsieh, 2015). Understanding professional identity is essential as long-term commitment to the

profession is supported by the creation of contexts in which teachers can connect their own values, beliefs and practices with the priorities of their setting; neglecting to consider professional identity undermines the very high-quality teaching we are hoping to sustain (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005).

Palmer (2007) defines identity as the “evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self, ... a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am” (p. 14). Learning is no longer seen merely as the acquisition of knowledge, but as becoming a person within a social landscape whose dynamic identity reflects and shapes that landscape (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014).

This journey within and across practices shapes who we are. Over time it accumulates memories, competencies, key formative events, stories and relationships to people and places. ... In other words, the journey incorporates the past and the future into our experience of identity in the present. (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014, p. 19)

Professional identity development is a social, cognitive and emotional process – dynamic and ongoing – in which teachers interpret and reinterpret their values and experiences (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220). Discussing the journey of one of the teachers in her study of caring behaviours, O’Connor (2008) shares a similar view:

Christina consistently viewed her professional identity as being pervasive and as involving a process of *becoming* as opposed to merely *being*, or just playing a role within a given situation. The ‘surreal’ moments between taking on the teaching role and allowing it to slowly become ‘part of you’ are perhaps the most crucial moments in a teacher’s professional development. In fact, the link between the professional and the personal must surely imply that there cannot be any real professional development without personal development. (p. 125)

As well as being dynamic and contextualised, these understandings appreciate the personal within the professional. In professions such as nursing, the personal

commitment involved in the work makes it difficult if not impossible to compartmentalise one's professional life (Collin et al., 2008). For teachers as well, the 'professional' is typically such a central part of who they are that there is considerable overlap across contexts, in and out of work (O'Connor, 2008).

O'Connor (2008) differentiates between professional identity and professional role, whereby "*role* refers to the socially and culturally determined nature and commonly held expectations of an individual's professional self, [and] the idea of *identity* refers to the means by which individuals reflexively and emotionally negotiate their own subjectivity" (p. 118). Within her study, identity was conceptualised as having both active and reflective components; constructing identity in this way allowed O'Connor to capture participants' beliefs and philosophies as well as their enactment of these in their practice (p. 118). Professional identity can thus be construed as one's enacted professional philosophy, encompassing the personal and professional across contexts, with an emphasis on the dynamic nature of self as shaped in interactions with others. "Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this 'I' who teaches – without which I have no sense of the 'Thou' who learns" (Palmer, 2007, p. 10).

Having practised as teachers for years prior to joining the programme, specialist teachers typically already have a strong professional identity. They bring a variety of personal and professional experiences to this next phase in their professional lives. They also have differing motivations for shifting their careers at the times they have chosen to do so. Working in new roles, they will draw on aspects of their lived experience as teachers whilst shifting their practices considerably. As one example of this, they may begin itinerating between contexts and collaborating with teachers and families/whānau rather than working directly with children and young people. Explicitly considering professional identity development may be an important support during this transition, as specialist teachers refine their notion of self.

Professional identity and ideas on 'self'

Identity is premised on a notion of 'self'. Some researchers (e.g., Kelchtermans) have intentionally shifted away from *identity* to *self-understanding*, as the latter term

connotes action and the dynamic nature of our understandings of self. Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) tease out the multiple notions of *self*, drawing on the ideas of Lauriala and Kukkonen (2005) and Flores and Day (2006). Specifically, they draw on Lauriala and Kukkonen's ideas of the *actual*, *ideal* and *expected* self: self as it actually exists, the ideal self that we strive to move towards, and the self that others in our context project onto us and expect from us. Initial teachers, not unlike the rest of us, have shifting understandings of themselves that are shaped by their contexts. "For a teacher, the self encompasses not only notions of 'who am I?', but also of 'who am I as a teacher?'" ; the inextricable connection between professional and personal makes the study of identity development complex, intricate and often difficult to articulate (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 763). For Specialist Teachers, the question broadens again to include 'And now who am I as a specialist teacher?'

Increasingly, we are recognising the tangled connections between the personal and the professional. Bukor (2015) considers the personal as one's full life experiences, including schooling and professional education whilst the professional encapsulates one's teaching practice. Still, she argues for more holistic definitions of professional identity as professional philosophies are always mediated through personal belief systems. This expanded look at professional identity incorporates "not only the professional, educational, and pedagogical aspects of being a teacher but – more importantly – the imprints of the complex interconnectedness of one's cumulative life experiences of being a human being" (Bukor, 2015, p. 323). This all-embracing identity is expressed through actions, beliefs, values and assumptions that reveal how one interprets and responds to self and context.

Seminal research on professional identity in teacher education

Kelchtermans (2009, 2015) describes professional identity or self-understanding as the ways each of us stories our self over time and through our interactions with other people and contexts. He goes on to describe five components of self-understanding: self-image and self-esteem; job motivation; perception of the task, and perspective of the future. These five elements are interrelated and dynamic; they are continually

influenced by the person, their values and their contexts. Teachers' pedagogical choices teachers should emanate from their sense of self (Gordon, 2008).

Hahn Tapper (2013) posits that we cannot examine any one identity without looking at the inextricable links to all of our other identities. These varied identities are shaped, as well as foregrounded or backgrounded, in our interactions with others. Consider a room full of women, where the one African woman might feel it is her ethnicity that is in the forefront; in a room full of men, it is the fact that she is the only woman. Social identity theory "focuses on social context as the key determinant of self-definition and behaviour" (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012, in Hahn Tapper, 2013, p. 417). This is important in a study of professional identity, as it zooms the focus out to our many other identities, and the interplay between them across contexts.

Smith (Gordon, 2008) builds on Fried's work (2001, 1995) and supports students to develop a "teaching stance". Shifting from identity to stance implies action, physical as well as intellectual. This stance is an enacted professional identity then, embodied in the physical and in connection with one's students. Kelchtermans (2008) uses *stance* to position teachers as the narrators of their own lives, with the stories they tell situating them in a certain place and time. For him, *stance* also connotes the moral and politically charged implications of belonging, as belonging is never neutral. "In our stories we cannot but tell, show where we stand, where we belong to, whose side we're on" (p. 29).

Professional identity can be operationalised as the combination of one's satisfaction with their job, ongoing commitment to the occupation, sense of self-efficacy and levels of motivation (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012). Changes in motivation are particularly pertinent to this research. Students often enter the Specialist Teaching programme as practising teachers with extensive classroom experience. As noted earlier, many struggle initially with the emphasis on self-directed learning and digital literacy, for instance, as these pedagogies often differ from their initial teacher training. Perhaps theory around identity construction goes some way in explaining the way new learning threatens their equilibrium, disrupting their identity as they move 'back down' Benner's (1982) novice-to-expert continuum.

Considerations in scaffolding professional identity

Teachers guide children in the development of key competencies, such as building relationships with others, which serve them across the lifespan (Macfarlane et al., 2008). Specialist teachers zoom out to support the adults around the child as well. As teachers guide and scaffold the development of others, so should they be guided in their continued identity development. In Korthagen's words, we support children to ask, "Who am I ... and how can I live the life I wish in supportive relationships with others ... amidst the challenges I am faced with?" (2012, p. 22). We need to question ourselves as educators in similar ways.

Palmer continually emphasises the essential need to bring who we are to what we do (e.g., 2007, 2011). Korthagen (2012) similarly argues for identifying and cultivating our core qualities in order to develop an integrated and connected professional identity. He credits Buber (1923, in Korthagen, 2012) with the assertion that identities are formed as well as experienced in our interactions with others; connectedness is then a prerequisite for individual professional growth and the shared understanding that we are all connected, we are not in this alone. These notions sit well within Māori theorising whereby learners benefit from "a sense of belonging (whanaungatanga) and a place of belonging (tūrangawaewae)" (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 5).

Abrandt Dahlgren and Hammar Chiriack (2009) hark back to Wenger's (1998) work around communities of practice, noting that "professional identities are constructed and negotiated through participation and engagement in local communities of practice of which the university context could be seen as one community and the work-life context another" (p. 992). Conflicting messages about what is important, from one's disparate CoP can be a source of tension and frustration for teachers; importantly, they can also be a source of individual agency (Dayton, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006, in Hsieh, 2015). Specialist teachers often work across settings and engage in numerous CoP as part of their work, including the school-based teams in each school they serve. While they are studying, they are also immersed in on- and off-line CoP with interprofessional peers from a range of specialist areas. An important professional skill is learning who one is in each of these communities, how the

contexts are influencing one's identity and practice, and exploring the continuities and discontinuities as a source of professional wisdom.

As they practice in a rapidly changing world, teachers "are experimenting with their roles and recreating their professional identities in relation to the contexts that surround them, contexts that are shifting, sometimes in unexpected ways" (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 762). Explicitly and continually developing one's professional stance is increasingly important in today's world. Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) summarise global influences on education, and the implications for teachers. One is expected to develop and refine practice in response, and sometimes anticipation, of the "constant diversification in society" (p. 762). Schools have an expanding mandate, carrying out roles once filled by families/whānau, communities and workplaces.

Biographical and contextual factors which influence professional identity and practice, such as personal and professional history, teacher education and contextual variable were identified by Flores and Days (2006). Although their work is on pre-service teacher education, the findings have implication for teacher education at every level. Bishop et al. draw on the work of Elmore, Peterson and McCarthy (1996), and Bruner (1996) to stretch this notion:

Teachers make decisions about how and what to teach, not as a result of the structure they are placed within but rather as the result of a complex internal conversation between their past practices, their judgments about what to teach (which is strongly influenced by their perception of those whom they are teaching, which is influenced by their discursive positionings), by deeply rooted habits of practice, and what they think about what and how they should be teaching. (Bishop et al., 2012, p. 53)

The Specialist Teaching programme continues to explore the ways relational spaces within a teacher education programme can facilitate professional identity development across and within professional communities (Mentis et al., 2016, p. 68).

Implications of professional identity development for teacher educators

Professional identity in teachers is increasingly considered, researched and scaffolded in teacher education programmes, possibly because “developing a strong sense of a professional identity as a teacher may be crucial to the wellbeing of new members of the profession” (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 762). Teachers and specialist teachers need a strong sense of professional identity as a compass for decision-making in complex situations. Viewed in this way, development as a professional is less about “approximating better and better a reified body of knowledge. Rather it is developing a meaningful identity of both competence and knowledgeability in a dynamic and varied landscape of relevant practices” (Wenger-Traynor & Wenger-Traynor, 2015, p. 23). It is taking a professional stance.

Without a strong professional stance, teachers are at risk of implementing practices without considering the fit with an overarching set of principles or with the professional’s overall conceptual framework for teaching and learning (Hsieh, 2015). Implementing wide-ranging practices in such a way, without consistency or cohesiveness, often achieves limited results which can lead to frustration and even early burnout (Hsieh, 2015).

Studies evidence this shift in identify. Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) explored the professional identity development of teachers immediately after graduation from their initial teacher training and then again midway through their first year of teaching. They elicit metaphors from teachers as a way of tapping into tacit understandings, ways of knowing that teachers may not yet be able to articulate. Their study indicates that teachers shift from child-centred and relational views of professional identity (who they are in relation to the children they are supporting) to adopting a more self-focused metaphor around professional survival. These findings are similar to earlier research which explored the shifts from child-centred and constructivist approaches in the first year of teaching to more teacher-centred, traditional practices in the following year as they worked to manage their classrooms effectively (Flores & Day, 2006).

Flores and Day (2006) recommend an explicit focus on personal reflection of self and context, as well as the tensions therein, to bolster professional identity during teacher

education. Ideally, they note, this would be followed by induction processes for teachers which draw on collegial support, peer and student feedback, reflective practice and ongoing opportunities for professional learning and development. Whilst there is growing acknowledgement of the importance of a strong professional stance, and professional programmes are increasingly setting learning goals around identity development, there is limited research on how such programmes can develop identity (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). Communities of practice are well placed to support teachers during and after formal training. Building on the work of Mead and Bruner, O'Connor (2008) asserts the centrality of reflective practice and social communication to the development of professional identity, where professional identity is seen as "the means by which individual teachers negotiate and reflect on the socially situated aspects of their role" (p. 118).

Participation in communities of practice has tangible benefits, such as support with problems, collective solution-finding and professional development. Moreover, "their greatest value lies in the intangible outcomes, such as the relationship they build among people, the sense of belonging they create, the spirit of inquiry they generate, and the professional confidence and identity they confer to their members" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 15). Communities of practice are also a source of collective meaning making and self-efficacy; "by co-constructing understandings of their responsibilities for student learning, and collectively giving meaning and purpose to practices that compose their work, teachers' engagement in shared practice shaped their efficacy beliefs" (Takahashi, 2011, p. 733). Working together, expertise is distributed and resources are created and mined collectively (Edwards, 2005).

Authentic practice

This section makes a case for the study of authentic practice and summarises current understandings. Constructivism and co-constructivism are discussed, before exploring enablers and barriers to authentic practice in an education context and the implications for teacher education.

Authentic practice has its roots in humanistic psychology, as pioneered by Maslow and others in the 1970s (Korthagen, 2004). During this movement, known as Humanistic Based Teacher Education (HBTE), teachers were encouraged to question “‘Who am I?’, ‘what kind of teacher do I want to be?’, and ‘how do I see my role as a teacher?’, all of which are essential questions when it comes to developing a professional identity” (p. 81). Long after the HBTE movement, the need for teacher education to focus on the “person of the teacher” remains (Korthagen, 2004, p. 79).

One goal of postgraduate study is connecting students with the principles, practices and evidence-base of the profession. A less tangible and possibly more profound goal of higher education is connecting professionals with their deepest selves, cultivating lifelong learners who continually connect what they do with who they are in dynamic and reflective ways (Palmer, 2007). Palmer argues that without this self-knowledge, teachers cannot genuinely understand their content area or their students. “When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well” (2007, p. 3).

As shared in the previous section, Korthagen (2004) posits two fundamental questions of teacher education: what are the essential qualities of a good teacher, and how can teacher education promote those qualities? In grappling with these questions, Korthagen argues for a more holistic consideration of teacher qualities, far beyond that which can be described with reference to isolated competencies. Similarly, Palmer’s argument that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (2007, p. 10) positions authentic practice as the embodiment of professional identity.

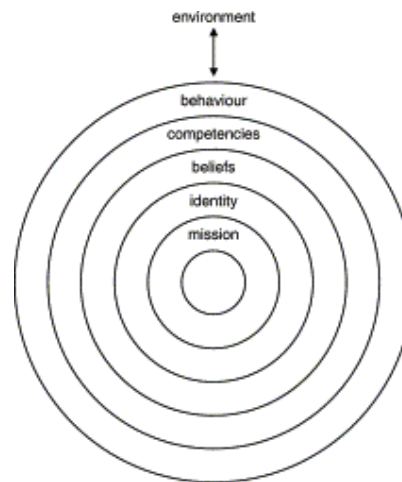


Figure 2. *The onion: A model of levels of change*
(Reprinted from Korthagen, 2004, p. 80, copyright 2004 Elsevier)

Korthagen has developed a layered model of change as shown in Figure 2; in describing each layer, he emphasises the importance of considering all behaviour in context and exploring the ways each layer is influenced by every other layer. The *environment* locates any behaviour within a context, and notes the reciprocal influence between individuals and the spaces in which they practice. *Behaviour*, like *environment*, is that which can be directly observed and where much of our traditional focus lies. *Competencies* are comprised of knowledge, skills and attitudes; they establish the potential for behaviour rather than the specific behaviour itself. For example, one may know what to do in a certain situation, but on a bad day with a difficult group, might exhibit less than their highest competency. *Beliefs* are the ideas educators hold around teaching and learning that influence their practices. Unexamined, their beliefs can impact their expectations for Māori (Bevan-Brown, 2006; Bevan-Brown, Heung, Jelas, & Phongaksorn, 2014) and diverse learners (Biklen & Burke, 2006; Kluth, Straut, & Biklen, 2003). Teachers hold beliefs about themselves as well, and how they see themselves informs their professional identity.

Given time and reflective practice, the inner layers will begin to resonate with the outer layers. “Ideally, there is a complete ‘alignment’ of the levels, which means that the teacher’s behaviour, competencies, beliefs, identity and mission together form a

coherent whole matching the environment” (Korthagen, 2004, p. 87). Palmer (2007) cautions that the ultimate goal of professional practice is authenticity, rather than perfection. “By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means I become more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am” (p. 14). Cultivating authentic practices is important in our current educational climate, as they provide a counterbalance to evidence-based medicine and other initiatives that emphasise compliance over authenticity.

A case for authentic practice

Murray et al. (2008) warn of the dangers inherent in ‘evidence’ considered narrowly as that which has undergone rigorous meta-analysis in line with politically determined hierarchies of evidence, such as in evidence-based medicine. “The ‘evidence’ does not speak for itself, but it is in fact a synthesis of evidence that obeys the paradigmatic rules of postpositivism, and is packaged and delivered for ready implementation by medical and healthcare practitioners” (Murray et al., 2008, p. 684). From a non-Western standpoint, this is especially problematic. Grass-roots, culturally responsive programmes may be devalued for lacking a western evidence-base; whilst organisations continue to fund, mandate and implement programmes that remain unsuitable for Māori (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013).

Strict interpretations of evidence-based practice undermine authenticity, as they prize fidelity over interventions tailored to integrate the research evidence, professional wisdom/ reflective practice and views of the client (Bourke et al., 2005). Reifying research evidence may also threaten the integrity of professionals, in particular pressuring them to implement practices that do not fit for them or their clients. Authentic practice, in contrast, invites professionals to balance compliance and total certainty with a degree of uncertainty. This fits with Biesta’s (2010) assertion that knowing what has worked in the past is never a guarantee of what will work in the future; there will always be a gap between one’s knowledge base and the current situation. “The way forward must ... be tentative and marked with uncertainty. This is not to say that we cannot have values and convictions, but it means acknowledging the

implicit danger in aligned ‘epistemic certitude’ and an authoritarian stance” (Murray et al., 2008, p. 684).

Alongside an ethic of compliance, Murray et al. (2008) encourage an ‘ethic of authentic practice’ (p. 682); whereby evidence-based actions are mediated through reflection on self and context, and are consistent with one’s professional stance. Drawing on Derrida’s (2003) ideas on responsibility, they position authentic practice at the intersection of current practice-based dilemmas and the limits of our knowledge. “Ethical responsibility begins, he writes, where a kind of procedural or technical knowledge arrives at its limit, where it does not or cannot apply, or where it applies only under duress” (p. 685). It is in those moments, when there are no rules, that we must be able to fall back on our own values, beliefs and principles for decision-making.

Understandings of authentic practice

Authentic practice is the stance we bring to our actions, especially in situations at the limits of our existing knowledge which afford us the opportunity to make decisions best reflecting our values, beliefs and self-understanding. In her work interrogating Foucault’s ideas, Moore (1987) notes:

The ability to decide is not related to knowledge of a principle, a rule defining what is good; rather it is related to the possibility for action when one undertakes to know oneself as a theorist; that is, as one who can reflect on the authentic basis for action. (p. 93)

Palmer (2007) envisages professionals practising in ways that align with their values and beliefs, resonate with their inner lives, and consistently bring the personal to the professional. Authentic practice can also be conceptualised as the congruence between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974), wherein our actual words and deeds match our professed practices. *Whanaungatanga* (relationship building) serves as an example: irrespective of time pressures and job descriptions, a professional may consistently create space to cultivate relationships with the child, whānau and other team members before any other work.

As well as these more intra-individual notions of authentic practice, Palmer (1997, p. 13) urges us to honour the “capacity for connectedness” within authentic interactions, and challenges representations of teaching as isolated sets of technical skills performed by individuals. Similarly, in Kaupapa Māori, connectedness is about “drawing connections between people and the environment in which they live. ... Connecting is related to issues of identity, place, spiritual relationships and community wellbeing” (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 9). Palmer also argues for a more holistic exploration of self, one that considers intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects (2007). “Reduce teaching to intellect, and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual, and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on one another for wholeness” (p. 5). Authentic practice therefore cultivates depth in the individual whilst fostering breadth in our connectedness to others.

Considering authenticity from a cultural standpoint, Morrison and Vaoleti (2011a) operationalise Graham Smith’s (1997) work on practices that support Māori and Pacific students to achieve. Although not called authentic practices per se, these practices operationalise authenticity.

- *Tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination) – learning to live together in harmony while maintaining self-determination; balancing global and local in affirming one’s own cultural practices
- *Taonga tuku iho* (cultural aspirations) – learning to be as Māori
- *Ako Māori* (culturally preferred pedagogy) – formal and nonformal learning, developed with and for Māori
- *Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga* (the socioeconomic mediation) – modelling the opportunities that come with education, that work to counteract the socioeconomic disadvantages faced by Māori
- *Whānau* (extended family structure) – involving the extended family in all aspects of education, valuing the intergenerational contribution and benefit of education
- *Kaupapa* (collective philosophy) – honouring the richness of diversity, and the ability to participate as a global citizen and a culturally-located individual.

Constructivist approaches

Constructivist approaches enable authenticity as they are rooted in individual sense-making (Faltis, 2008). Combining Palmer's self-examination with a constructivist approach to education meshes two belief systems: the importance of teaching in ways that are congruent with our personal and professional selves/identities, and the notion that our identities and practices are dynamic, ever-changing and under revision (Gordon, 2008). Ideally, tertiary teachers could enact these understandings of self for their own benefit and that of their students, and their students would, in turn, do this for themselves, as well as for the children and others with whom they work.

When teachers become more conscious of their underlying qualities, their strengths and weaknesses, they are more likely to respond to the challenges they face in a way that not only is consistent with who they are but also is beneficial to their students. (Gordon, 2008, p. 327)

Through reflective practice, professionals increase their self-understanding, challenge their own assumptions, and are positioned to make deeper connections with others. They can articulate why they do what they do, bringing a layer of transparency and authenticity to the interaction (Loughran, 2006a, Loughran & Russell, 2002, in Williams & Power, 2010). Co-constructivism is a natural extension of constructivism, and allows for meaning making across individuals. Spaces and possibilities are created for authentic partnership with students, and for co-authoring knowledge in ways that integrate their perspectives (Bishop et al., 2009).

Tertiary educators can encourage dynamic, authentic and constructivist teaching practices by modelling and teaching cycles of inquiry, reflection and growth (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). They can also legitimate more sensory reflections, such as the exploration of emotions, as an integral part of reflective practice (Korthagen et al., 2012; Williams & Power, 2010). Frameworks for reflective practice, such as the Matrix of Perspectives (Mentis, Annan, & Bowler, 2009) can be used to understand our inner and outer selves, bring espoused and actual practices into alignment, and more effectively collaborate with others.

Co-constructivism is premised on vulnerability and authenticity. Both parties resist the temptation of fierce self-confirmation and poise themselves for growth through their willingness to listen, reconsider and change. Bullough (2005) sees this as the choice between “self-protection and stagnation, or growth” (p. 35). Building habits of authentic practice into higher education creates intentional and integrated professionals whose practices are congruent with their deepest beliefs, knowledge and competencies.

Navigating barriers to authentic practice in the field

Authentic practice is always enacted within a policy context which can enable or hinder the practice (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; O’Connor, 2008). When policies serve as barriers to authentic practice, teachers adjust their roles in relation to institutional demands and according to their own belief systems (O’Connor, 2008). O’Connor’s (2008) study of teachers’ caring behaviours provides a powerful example as caring behaviours are intuitively valued but overtly dismissed in a policy context focussed on measurable performance against professional standards.

Irrespective of pressure to do otherwise, teachers in O’Connor’s (2008) study “viewed the ‘kindness and caring’ ... they showed to others as both a professional choice and as a necessary part of their work” (p. 121). Caring was conceptualised across three lenses: *performative* (caring as a technique used to lift student performance); *professional* (managing student relationships as part of one’s professional role) and *philosophical/humanistic* (caring for students in ways that fit with individual ideas of what teachers are and do). These were individual professional decisions, still shaped within a professional context (p. 121).

My own study focuses on deep self-understanding and authenticity as part of professional practice. Whilst teachers might possess these dispositions as part of what drew them to the profession, postgraduate study and professional practice allow them to explicitly consider how to develop and enact them in a variety of contexts and in amidst varying levels of support for such behaviours. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) discuss the tensions new teachers navigate as part of their development of micropolitical literacy, or understandings of the political realities of their role. Each of

these tensions could be interpreted as critical in individual teacher sensemaking, and lying at the intersection between authentic practice, wellbeing and professional identity. “Balancing distance and commitment” (p. 762) for instance, connotes the delicate balance between caring for and caring about students while remaining detached enough for personal wellbeing.

“Compensating for negative experiences” (p. 764) also highlights teachers’ need to identify their circles of influence versus control (Covey, 1989) and to develop strategies for sustaining themselves in contexts and roles that challenge their wellbeing, their understandings of what a teacher should do and be, and the ways they want to (but cannot) practice. Rob, a teacher in Kelchtermans and Ballet’s (2002) study, for example, found particular ways he would compensate for what was not working for him; where he could not get his relational needs met through colleagues, he built a relationship with the principal instead:

When things were not what he wanted them to be in the job and he did not see a chance to change them for the better, he looked for and focussed on other pleasant elements in the situation to keep a satisfying balance of the positive and the negative aspects. (p. 765)

Implications of authentic practice development for teacher educators

Education can and should be transformative, as we support students to “call into question (their) taken-for-granted habits of mind or mindsets to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open and reflective in order to guide (their) actions” (Keegan, 2011, p. 66). In order for learning to be transformative, a certain amount of disequilibrium and vulnerability are necessary. This disequilibrium is ultimately positive, leading to greater levels of competence and authenticity, but can be uncomfortable in the short-term as students reconsider that which they considered to be true.

Authentic practice requires vulnerability, which Bullough (2005) defines as being “capable of being hurt” (p. 23). Applied to teaching, he adds that vulnerability motivates human development; enriches competence in situations where failure is a

real possibility, and leads to the relationships and rewards at the centre of teaching. Teachers react to vulnerability differently, some falling back on security and certainty while others seek growth (Bullough, 2005). Bullough describes a student who, in resisting being vulnerable, struggles to receive feedback on her practice or to take on board new ideas. Although her old ideas were ineffective, they were decidedly hers; this meant that challenges to her ideas felt like challenges to her as a person as well (p. 33). Whilst acknowledging the potential difficulties inherent within vulnerability, Bullough encourages teachers to embrace vulnerability as a necessary component of professional and personal growth.

However, humans respond to threats to equilibrium through fight, flight or freeze; this can be especially true with top-down professional development which assumes that experts know what it is teachers need to know, subtly insinuating there is something wrong with what they are doing currently (Korthagen, 2009). In the Specialist Teaching programme, experienced teachers enter the course with more established identities after years in practice. Additionally, for many of them the study is compulsory, built into their employment conditions, rather than chosen. With reference to Benner's (1982) novice to expert continuum, they may see expertise as one linear pathway rather than something task- and context-dependent, and perceive aspects of the course – such as digital literacy – as moving them back towards novice. Pilgrim, Hornby and Macfarlane (2017) examined the enablers and barriers to competency development identified by one cohort of Specialist Teaching students. These authors suggest a careful approach to pedagogy, in appreciation of the risks new learning, alongside the time pressures of study, work and family, may pose to deep learning.

Mitigating the resistance embodied in fight, flight or freeze requires the right balance of support and challenge, where an individual holds onto personal power and a sense of self-efficacy (Korthagen, 2009). Palmer notes the connections to motivation: “We lose heart, in part, because teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability” (2007, p. 17). “Māori learners (in fact all learners) need an environment in which they feel culturally safe and surrounded by like minds, in order to make sense of their learning and derive meaning from it.” (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 22). Herein lie the connections

between authentic practice, professional identity and wellbeing, and the implications for tertiary education.

Top-down (technical rational) professional development begins with what is wrong and how to fix it, with its implicit assumption that your performance is lacking and others know better what you should be doing (Korthagen, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2015). Shifting to strengths-based forms of professional development builds on what is already working and creates a space for “learning from within” (Korthagen, 2009, p. 196).

The connections between authentic practice and professional identity development were made earlier in the literature review. CoP can encourage and lift authentic practices by modelling authenticity and creating space for the head, heart and hands of practice (Wenger et al., 2002). Who we become in the community is shaped by what others bring, what is needed, and an understanding of our unique contribution. As tertiary providers, we can establish the infrastructure and provide a level of scaffolding around these communities. However, tertiary providers must allow the group to pursue its own interests; develop its own dynamics, processes and group identity, and determine what constitutes expertise within the group (Wenger, et al., 2002).

Wellbeing

This section summarises contemporary understandings of wellbeing and the influence of positive psychology on both the conceptualisation and research on wellbeing. The wellbeing of teachers is considered as well as the implications for tertiary providers. Lastly, an argument is made for replacing the notion of ‘wellbeing’ with the more holistic, culturally responsive and relational construct of professional fulfilment.

Understandings of wellbeing have shifted over time, with the majority of current definitions enfolding five to seven interconnected elements. Definitions most often refer to a sense of personal wellbeing across the following domains: emotional, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, and environmental (Donatelle, 2015). Cultural wellbeing is also a key aspect of holistic wellbeing (Haar & Brougham, 2013; Houkamau & Sibley, 2011; Manuela & Sibley, 2012). Current notions of wellbeing are holistic,

dynamic and interconnected (Donatelle, 2015). Definitions of wellbeing are often relational; cultural wellbeing, in particular, includes how indigenous peoples feel their own values and beliefs are reflected in their context (Haar & Brougham, 2011). In an education context where we are continually losing experienced and able teachers to work-related stress, especially in times of change (Troman & Woods, 2000), exploring the connections between wellbeing and practice is essential.

Historical understandings

Maslow had a significant influence on early psychology (Lachman, 2008). In 1943, he proposed a more holistic and human-centred model of motivation, commonly known as the “hierarchy of needs”. These needs – security and safety; belongingness, acceptance and affiliation; esteem, and self-actualisation – are interconnected, whereby a focus on higher needs is predicated on having met lower needs effectively. Maslow argued that higher needs (such as self-actualisation) become less important when more basic needs (such as hunger) are not yet met; and whilst lower needs are driven by deficits, our highest needs are driven by our desire for growth. He referred to self-actualisation (at that point, the highest need in his triangle) as “the desire for self-Fulfilment”, where a person strives to become “more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (1943, p. 382). The role of professionals in the self-actualization process was to support healthy people to the next level, rather than remediating deficits.

Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) work follows on from Maslow’s and lies at the intersection of authentic practice and wellbeing. Growing up in Europe during World War II, he was initially intrigued by the people who could find a sense of wellbeing in either mundane or horrific circumstances. Later, he queried the flatline of happiness amidst decades of significant economic growth, to find that money and happiness are only correlated to a certain point, after which more money does not beget more happiness. This inquiry led Csikszentmihalyi to research artists and others who work for love rather than money, who seek and find those “peak performances” Maslow referenced. Surprisingly, he found that peak performance was not limited to musicians and others who had invested thousands of hours into their crafts, but could be found in everyday

tasks performed by ordinary people. Csikszentmihalyi coined the term 'flow' to describe activities and experiences perfectly matched to one's level of skill, activities so wholly absorbing that people lose track of themselves with the task. Flow theory attempts to explain how to find happiness in both extraordinary and everyday tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; 2009).

Like Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi, Morris and DeVane (1994) sought to understand wellbeing more holistically, and coined the term *integrated wellness* to describe an ongoing approach to support the whole person. Their work highlighted the need for contexts designed to foster wellness, the continual state of flux around wellness, and the changes in our professional practice linked to our wellness. "[Wellbeing] is at its best a constant effort by an individual(s) to achieve a state of wholeness which is characterized by feelings of serenity and an overall sense of wellbeing" (Morris & DeVane, 1994, p. 33). Integrated wellbeing is distinct from popular terms such as self-care. Ecological in nature, there is equal emphasis on supporting individuals and creating contexts that promote wellbeing (Csiernik, 2006). A work context can reinforce personal efforts by protecting workloads, considering the person's family and other commitments, and building opportunities for social connection.

Contemporary understandings of wellbeing and the influence of positive psychology

In spite of the work of Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi and others, the field of psychology historically focused on what was wrong with individuals and groups. Studies determined what was 'average' in any given area, and people considered 'below average' were supported to come into line with the majority (Achor, 2011). Psychology has shifted its emphasis in recent years, however, as "if we study what is merely average, we will remain merely average" (Achor, 2011, 4:51). Research and practice focused on the remediation of problems has been challenged, and researchers are increasingly looking instead at the prevention of difficulties and the growth of competencies.

In their ground-breaking work in positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) advocated a movement away from traditional research questions and methods

which typically over-focused on the identification and remediation. They argued that decades of examining what is broken has provided us with a deep understanding of the problems themselves, and how we might support people through adversity. However, as an unintended consequence of this slanted focus, “psychologists have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living” (p. 5). To rectify this, we must refocus our efforts on identifying and building positive qualities at the individual and systems level. Our practice and research must then work on “identifying and nurturing (people’s) strongest qualities, what they own and are best at, and helping them find niches in which they can best live out these strengths” (p. 6).

Csikszentmihalyi echoes that the “field of psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best (p. 7).” Māori leader Apirana Ngata echoes these sentiments: “There are two ways of tackling problems. One is to explore the bad and feature it. The other is to discover good and encourage it” (Percy, 1989, in Bevan-Brown, 2006, p. 14). More than a decade on, this shift has resulted in an increased depth, breadth and rigor in our understandings of wellbeing.

In *Flourish*, Seligman (2012) retraces the origins and evolution of positive psychology. He recounts his earlier work centring on happiness and life satisfaction, which involved three elements of increasing depth and complexity. The first of these is positive emotion; a life filled with pleasures such as yoga, time with friends and positive feedback can be considered a *pleasant life*. An *engaged life* by contrast is about absorption in activities which produce a sense of flow. In another contrast to pleasure and positive emotion, “there are no shortcuts to flow. On the contrary, you need to deploy your highest strengths and talents to meet the world in flow” (p. 11). The third element of happiness comprises the *meaningful life*, as “human beings, ineluctably, want meaning and purpose in life” (p. 12).

Schueller and Seligman (2010) further explore the connections of Seligman’s three pathways to happiness: pleasure, engagement and meaning (Seligman, 2004). The three pathways are unique, and a combined pursuit of all three has a cumulative effect on subjective wellbeing. Pleasure is the hedonic pursuit of happiness, encompassing

shorter-term sensory pleasures (sex, food, etc.) But engagement and meaning are more highly correlated with long-term wellbeing, and pleasure is inversely correlated with objective wellbeing (e.g., having cake often leads to instant pleasure while working against long-term health goals).

After ten years, Seligman significantly shifted his theory. While retaining the core elements of happiness theory (positive emotion, engagement and meaning) he expanded his theory to include additional factors. Seligman no longer believed that happiness should be the focus of positive psychology, or that life satisfaction should be the driving force. Critiquing the original theory, Seligman unpacks three fundamental flaws: 'happiness' has been conflated with cheerfulness in our popular culture; life satisfaction is an unreliable measure, as perceptions are influenced heavily by one's mood in the moment; and the three elements defined earlier do not adequately explain choices that people make for 'their own sake' (2012, p. 14).

Seligman's new theory posits wellbeing as a construct composed of measurable elements. He describes five elements of wellbeing, arguing that to be included they must: contribute to wellbeing, be able to be measured and defined independent of any other element, and be pursued for their own sake (2012, p. 16). The five elements are:

- Positive emotion – including the subjective measures of happiness and life satisfaction;
- Engagement – the state of flow produced through complete absorption in an activity, remembered as pleasurable only after the fact;
- Relationships – positive bonds with other people
- Meaning – measured objectively as well as subjectively, "belong to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self" (p. 17)
- Accomplishment – the pursuit of mastery, success or achievement for its own sake

Seligman's original theory encompassed 'signature strengths', twenty-four virtues the utilisation of which could lead to states of flow. In his current wellbeing theory, these strengths are still essential but now underpin and apply to each element.

Seligman summarises his theory as:

Wellbeing theory is plural in method as well as substance: positive emotion is a subjective variable, defined by what you think and feel. Engagement, meaning, relationship, and accomplishment have both subjective and objective components, since you can believe you have engagement, meaning, good relations, and high accomplishments and be *wrong*, even deluded. The upshot of this is that wellbeing cannot exist just in your own head: wellbeing is a combination of feeling good as well as actually having meaning, good relationships, and accomplishment. The way we choose our course in life is to maximise all five of these elements. (2012, p. 25)

Teacher wellbeing and the links to learning

Wylie's (2007) snapshot of Aotearoa New Zealand teachers found that whilst ninety percent enjoyed teaching, and two-thirds reported good or very good morale, less than half considered their workload to be manageable and less than a third had work/life balance. The dimensions of their work that most impacted their wellbeing were large class sizes; workload; classroom resources; salaries and difficult student behaviour; management within the schools, and limited professional development (Garrick et al., 2017). Teachers commented on workloads that left them "feeling exhausted, stressed and time-pressured" with days "so tightly scheduled that they may not have time to eat lunch, and regularly engage in unpaid work-related activity outside of work hours" (Garrick et al., 2017, npg). Specialist teachers based in schools may feel these pressures directly, whilst those in itinerant roles may not. Nonetheless, educators in the full range of roles should recognise the pressures on teachers, how these negatively impact teacher wellbeing, and the implications for teachers support.

Kelchtermans' work, more focused on teaching and teacher education, complements Seligman's work nicely. What Kelchtermans has termed professional *stance* and *stamina* (2008) complements Seligman's passion for "identifying and nurturing their strongest qualities, what they own and are best at, and helping them find niches in which they can best live out these strengths" (2000, p. 6). Both researchers are concerned with fortifying the individual, tapping into and lifting their unique talents

and perspectives, and preparing them long-term for the ups and downs of professional practice.

Teacher wellbeing is premised on the assumption that when we are not well, we cannot learn well. What we do not understand deeply and fully integrate into our ontologies and epistemologies, we cannot enact in our daily practice. Deep learning happens at multiple layers of ourselves, including not just our behaviour and growing competency, but the more inner layers of our beliefs, identities and mission (Korthagen, 2009). Deep learning actively transforms the learner and the learning context; evidence of new understandings is embodied in the learner's identity and actions. This learning is by definition sustainable and transformative, as it changes and harmonizes who we are with what we do in our practice (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2008).

When learning is effective, people are not only creating new knowledge, but re-creating and transforming themselves (Cook-Sather, 2003 & 2006, in Gordon, 2008). Because learning happens on the border between the known and unknown, competence and incompetence, a certain amount of disequilibrium accompanies this deep transformation. Ultimately valuable, this transformation can still be stressful in the short-term. Professionals often need to unlearn practices that no longer serve them or their clients, even when the temptation is to hold on tightly to practises that have come to be linked with their professional identities.

As teachers unlearn traditional notions of practice, it is important to consider the ways this influences their views of themselves as practitioners (Korthagen, 2004) and how best to support them through this transformation. The optimal type and level of support will vary for each professional: too much support, and they are shielded from the catalysts of their own development; too little support and they move into survival mode, which also prevents their deep learning (Korthagen, 2004).

As learners change, they will reciprocally influence the wider layers of their ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Professionals want to implement their new learning by working in new ways; they seek contexts where they can utilise their skills, contribute to knowledge creation in their communities of practice, and work in ways that are fulfilling (Leach, 2009). Butting up against traditional systems, this desire to enact new

knowledge and skills can be stressful. Teachers leaving the Specialist Teaching programme may value interprofessional practice, as one example, but still need to function effectively within and across institutions with time and policy barriers to interprofessional practice. Because new ways of learning, teaching and assessment will need to co-exist with more traditional and prescriptive methods, teachers need the skills and equanimity for dealing with this. As they navigate these real-world tensions, they will need to have ways of practising that preserve their integrity and wellbeing. A role of teacher educators then becomes to explicitly discuss and prepare students for the ongoing challenge that will be part of their professional practice, and to support their continued self-efficacy, wellbeing and authentic practice within these challenges.

Implications of wellbeing development for teacher educators

The responsibility of tertiary institutions is to prepare students in such a way that they continue to embody authentic and effective practices throughout their careers. By doing this, professional programmes partially fulfil their mandate of contributing to just and effective societies where citizens are prepared to live, to do, to know and to live together (Delors, 1996). Pressures on the tertiary sector can serve as an enabler or barrier to these ideals. Boumelha (2012) summarises changes to Aotearoa New Zealand's tertiary sector in recent decades and the implications for supporting student wellbeing. Volume-driven funding was introduced in the 1990s, persisting until 2007, with an emphasis on access and participation or "simply admitting more and more people rather than upon success" (p. 33). Incoming students were variably prepared, a significant number dropped out, and the Government grew concerned with what they perceived to be a wasted investment. From 2008, enrolments were capped; from 2012, tertiary funding had a Student Achievement Component based on student retention and progression, course completion and degree completion (Tertiary Education Commission, 2013). This emphasis naturally led to increased focus on "support for learning and general student welfare" (Boumelha, 2012, p. 34). Supporting student wellbeing has consequently become part of tertiary education's formal mandate, with financial motives for student support (Boumelha, 2012).

Pedagogy has a significant influence on wellbeing and the essential connection between relationship-based pedagogy and classroom learning is well explored in the work of Bishop (e.g. Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth & Peter, 2012). In 2006, Bishop and Berryman developed a series of narratives from their interviews with teachers and young people. Whilst teachers attributed low achievement to the within-person deficits of Māori students, the students themselves identified their relationships and interactions with their teachers as having the greatest influence (Bishop et al., 2012).

The way students saw it, what was needed to improve Māori students' achievement was for teachers to develop and adopt a relationship-based pedagogy in their classrooms. In other words, it became apparent that teachers must relate to and interact with Māori students in a manner different from the common practice if a change in Māori students' achievement was to occur (Bishop et al., 2012, p. 51).

The Specialist Teaching programme recognises the value of the more humanistic pedagogies, such as empathy and other caring behaviours. These skills are explicitly discussed, modelled and promoted in hopes of establishing wellbeing and authentic practice as integral parts of students' "occupational socialisation" (Murphy, Jones, Edwards, James, & Mayer, 2009, p. 262). By experiencing this approach first-hand, the team believes students will understand and appreciate the value of it from the inside out, and will be further able to embody wellbeing and authenticity in their own professional practice.

Moving away from "wellbeing"

Several tensions emerge with a focus on wellbeing as it is commonly understood. In their book *The Wellness Syndrome*, Cederström and Spicer (2015) critique the current framing of wellness as a moral imperative, narrowed to the individual and the physical in ways that obscure humanity, community and social activism. Struggling with wellness is viewed as a personal rather than systemic problem; the flipside of considerable choice and focus on lifestyle is the burden of blame when one continues to struggle. This may explain the corporate endorsement of mindfulness and other remedies, which shift the problem from a toxic environment to workers needing to

manage their stress better. Cederström & Spicer (2015) endorse Purser and Loy's (n.d.) blog post:

Rather than addressing the root causes of these feelings it provides us with 'tools' for self-help. ... Stress, anxiety and feelings of depression are not seen as a creation of the external work environment. Instead they are a creation of your own lazy and unfocused mental habits. (p. 25)

In this way, the status quo remains unchallenged, and the individual works harder to compensate. Additionally, in education, overly focusing on wellbeing also risks perpetuating the discourse that teachers are struggling. Flores and Day (2006) revisit Day's (1999) earlier ideas on teacher wellbeing, where he considers a new teacher's first few years as a reciprocal struggle: the teacher seeks to influence their environment, and match work with who they are and what they know, whilst the environment seeks to shape the new teacher through school cultures and policies. I would argue, however, that discourses of *coping* and *managing* and *surviving* are not helpful to teachers, as they inadvertently limit agency and the possibility of fulfilment.

Teaching calls for and, at its best, involves daily, intensive and extensive use of both emotional labour (e.g. smiling on the outside whilst feeling anything but happy on the inside) and emotional work which enables teachers to manage the challenges of teaching classes which contain students with a range of diverse motivations, personal histories and learning capacities. However, too much of the former leads to a disengagement with the complexities of teaching and learning, and a loss of trust by students; and too much investment in one's emotional self may lead to personal vulnerability, feelings of inadequacy at being unable to engage everyone in learning all the time and, in extreme cases, overwork and breakdown (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 221).

Margolis et al. (2014) argue that the "global tilt towards the excessive promotion of institutional wellbeing at the expense of individual teachers" (p. 391) is having the same effect in education. The focus on building resilience may promote coping in situations where we should be resisting (Cederström & Spicer, 2015; Margolis et al., 2014). This echoes Delors' (2013) idea that we need to work within the grey area of what can be changed and cannot be changed. Teacher burnout, a combination of

exhaustion and disengagement (Timms, Graham, & Cottrell, 2007), is an example of blaming the individual when they cannot work within a context, rather than examining destructive forces such as workloads and restricted autonomy. Resilience is by definition supporting people to thrive, not just survive, in less than optimal situations. Over-focusing on the individual in these situations downplays our need to fix the system (Cederström & Spicer, 2015). Working at every level, and in balance, would better support the development of resilient and resistant professionals who adapt to the best in a context while reconstructing the worst.

As teacher educators, as with teachers themselves, there are big questions around these ideas. Thus, in working to promote the wellbeing of individual teachers, teacher educators must make important choices about the extent to which their limited time with candidates examines macro-educational issues that impact teaching, learning and wellbeing vs. ways individual teachers can manage the existing stresses of the profession (Margolis et al., 2014, p. 392).

In study and practice, preserving one's wellbeing should never be an excuse for a smaller, safer professional life (Kelchtermans, 2008). At the micro-level, teachers must continue to challenge and stretch themselves. Communities of practice, predicated on trust, must be places "where it is safe to speak the truth and ask hard questions. ... [Where] difficult discussions are embraced rather than avoided, and members can even use conflict as a way to deepen their relationships and their learning" (Wenger, et al., 2002, p. 37). At the macro-level, we must prevent the wellness imperative from getting in the way of social activism; creating a better world must not take a backseat to personal lifestyle choices, and the target of our deep work cannot be our body rather than our society (Cederström & Spicer, 2015).

As such, teaching might equally be framed as an opportunity for peak learning, as each educator identifies and advocates for the conditions they need for optimal performance. Peak learning lies in the match between skill and challenge: less skill, and one can be overwhelmed; less challenge and one can be bored or even apathetic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Study and practice provide wide-ranging learning

opportunities, and teachers can be empowered to self-determine and self-direct their development.

In contrast to simplified notions of wellness, the present study is less concerned with a collection of healthy activities (e.g. doing yoga, eating well) and more with a state of being (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001). It is in this state of being – who we *are* in the world and not just what we *do* – where wellbeing intersects with professional identity and authentic practice. Children are increasingly viewed through a holistic lens; this holistic view must also be extended to their teachers (Kwo & Intrator, 2004).

Research connecting professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing

This literature review considered the need for professionals who continually learn to be; learn to know; learn to do, and learn to live together (Delors, 1996). The current educational context of Aotearoa New Zealand was explored in relation to these key pillars of lifelong learning. The importance of a strong professional identity as a compass for navigating this terrain was established, as well as the need for tertiary education to develop professional identity more explicitly within formal study. Authentic practice was conceptualised as enacted professional identity and I argued that effective practices are best cultivated by supporting teachers to work in ways that fit for them as well as aligning with their context and the current evidence base. Lastly, I made a case for the formal consideration of wellbeing as part of professional practice, but argued that current notions of wellbeing are self-limiting and could be reconsidered. I suggested framing wellbeing as the convergence of personal and professional, identity and practice, in ways that fit for the individual in context.

Described this way, each of these constructs is inseparable from an understanding of the whole. There is a need for research in the connected up space in which I am working, and a need for cultural and first-person perspectives on identity, practice and wellbeing. To address the gap in this joined-up space, the following research questions have been developed:

1. How do participants make sense of the concepts of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing?
2. What do they see as the connections between these ideas?
3. What do participants identify as the enablers, barriers and tensions to the development of their professional identity, wellbeing and authentic practice?
4. How do participants position themselves within and against the tensions in their professional lives?

These questions, and how they were addressed through a participatory narrative inquiry, are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This research was conducted with experienced teachers working in the field of inclusive education and enrolled in the Specialist Teaching programme. It draws on the individual and collective perspectives of fourteen experienced teachers enrolled in the two-year postgraduate programme in 2014 and 2015. This is a study of their lives, their practice and the ways they thought about fulfilment.

As a group, these women varied in age and stage, ethnicity, career path, personal and professional context, professional role and area of specialisation. Collectively, they had experienced the deaths and suicides of significant others; divorce and widowhood; cancer, major surgery and brain injury; solo parenting and parenting children with diverse learning needs, as well as professional burnout. Their interest in wellbeing was what drew them to the study, and the first connection they made with one another. Many of the participants were working full-time alongside their postgraduate study, often in professional roles that were new to them. As such, they often reflected on how to integrate work and study with other areas of their lives in ways that were sustainable and meaningful for them.

As part of a participatory narrative inquiry, involving interviews and focus whānau groups, these fourteen women and I met together over the course of two years. At the time, they were students from three cohorts in the Specialist Teaching programme; during our time together some were in their first year, some their first then second year, and some were in their final year and then finished with the study. We met individually at the beginning and end of each year, and together as a whānau group throughout the two years. We grappled with questions of identity, authentic practice and wellbeing: what these ideas meant to them and how they fitted together. Later, we explored more refined questions related to fulfilment, and looked closely at what they saw as the barriers and enablers to fulfilment in their lives.

As outlined in Table 3, this chapter describes the context of the study, my approach to research and the overarching methodology. The primary sources of data, semi-

structured interviews and focus whānau group meetings, are described. Lastly, I discuss how metaphors developed by participants, and my researcher’s diary, were used to supplement these primary sources of data.

Table 3. Sections of methodology chapter

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Context of the study | Aotearoa New Zealand Specialist Teaching programme |
| My approach | |
| Methodology | Situating the study – the significance for (re)emerging professionals Narrative inquiry interweaving biculturally responsive practice and positive psychology |
| Methods | Ethical procedures and informed consent Finding participants Data collection methods Research interviews Focus groups Use of metaphor as a research method Matters of trustworthiness Analysis of interview and focus group data Researcher’s diary |

Context of the study

Aotearoa New Zealand

As culture is central to self-understandings and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, I strived to incorporate the Treaty of Waitangi’s principles of partnership, protection and participation into this research in ways that were genuine and respectful. Glynn (2015) suggests positioning ourselves as Treaty partners as a way forward that is helpful to Māori and informative for non-Māori. Glynn and others (Glynn, Berryman, Walker, Reweti & O’Brien, 2001, in Glynn, 2015) developed the analogy of a life partner relationship as a way to deconstruct healthy and unhealthy balances of power within our other working partnerships. This analogy supported me in considering

traditional power dynamics and consciously working to rebalance the many relationships inherent in my research: between Māori and non-Māori and also tertiary teacher and students, and researcher and participants.

Bevan-Brown (2001) argues that culturally responsive research must follow the six R's, whereby "the right person must ask the right questions of the right people in the right way at the right place and time" (p. 139) and that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ascertain what 'right' means in the particular situation. She argues that the right researcher ideally shares an ethnic background and cultural identity with participants, to reduce opportunities for miscommunication and misinterpretation through differing verbal and nonverbal ways of communicating. As an American-born Pākeha researcher, this was not something I could achieve. However, I could work to be "someone the person knows and trusts" (p. 139) and continually reflect on, seek guidance around, and work to improve my cultural competence. In this way, I tried to incorporate essential components of research with Māori, including: Māori knowledge; relationships, self-awareness; relevance; power-sharing and unleashing potential (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013).

Specialist Teaching and my role within the programme

As noted earlier, the present study is situated in Specialist Teaching, a programme facilitated jointly by Massey University and the University of Canterbury, which offers a postgraduate diploma through a combination of face-to-face and online learning. I work full time in the ST programme, as part of an interprofessional team of up to fifteen tertiary teachers. My professional role evolved over the course of my study, as I participated more centrally in the overall coordination of the programme alongside my teaching responsibilities. In 2014, my role as Coordinator of Networks and Wellbeing was created and formalised; this role included the coordination of regional whānau support groups, marking and extensions across the programme, and supporting the wellbeing of the students. Practicum coordination was added in 2015. As part of my commitment to biculturalism, I engaged in the informal support of Māori and Pacific Island students, adopting culturally responsive pedagogies with the intention of increasing and enacting my own cultural competence. Each of these roles shaped and

was shaped by my study, and afforded me increased opportunities to situate and enact my research within my practice context.

As discussed in the Introduction, the present study emerged from years of supporting students' wellbeing, appreciating the complexities of their work and supporting them to navigate the tensions in their working lives. Research is often critiqued for failing to bridge the academic-practitioner divide, exemplified by the "declining research relevance in the face of complex real-life problems" (Ospina, El Hadidy, & Hofmann-Pinilla, 2008, p. 131). In contrast, the present study counteracted this tendency; the research questions were my closest approximations of practitioners' complex and real-life questions, drawn from innumerable past conversations with students. The present study also seeks to address Pilgrim et al.'s (2017) recommendation to tertiary education providers to solicit and respond to student feedback as part of ongoing programme development.

This research is highly contextualised, attempting to understand specialist teachers' experiences and understandings within the context of their lives and their postgraduate study. Therefore, it was pertinent to select participants from within a programme I understood intimately. Like Chase (2003), I prioritised the need to understand participants' narrative environments, or the wider contexts and discourses surrounding their narratives. Framing stories in this way helps us to understand the influence of *preferred stories* on the individual. By situating the research in my own context, I could draw on my ecological understandings of the Specialist Teaching programme within the wider educational context of Aotearoa New Zealand to better comprehend what participants said, how it was said, and how it was said to me in particular as a tertiary teacher in their programme. I could better decipher the meaning behind and within individual participants' stories. One example of this is the common refrain within the programme of 'surviving the study' or 'seeing the light at the end of the tunnel', where study is framed as a challenge, something to be endured rather than enjoyed. Conscious of this, I noticed the exceptions – stories of study in which participants thrived, and felt grateful for the opportunity – and co-inquired into the ways they challenged the preferred story of surviving. Having worked in the education sector, I could do the same with their stories of professional practice.

Similarly, studying the experiences of postgraduate students while undertaking postgraduate study myself provided me with a deeper and more embedded understanding of participants' perspectives.

My approach to research

I approached this study with the intent of utilising one distinct methodology. My original plan was a linear one of gathering then analysing narratives from my participants, writing up findings with the implications for postgraduate study, and then embedding changes over time and to the extent that I was able to in my own ST programme teaching context. However, inspired by what Kincheloe refers to as “chasing complexity” (2005, p. 326), I began to challenge unilateral and one-dimensional ways of viewing research and my place within the research. I also came to understand that “knowledge production is a far more complex process than we originally thought; there are more obstacles to the act of making sense of the world than [I] had anticipated” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 327).

As my research was situated within my practice context, my development was inextricably connected to my relationships with participants. I had an insider/outsider position: familiar with their professional roles but with less current direct experience; familiar with their postgraduate programme but from a teacher rather than learner perspective; and familiar with their positioning as students although in a different programme from my own as a PhD candidate. As such, I related to their journeys. Their stories of shifting identities, and struggling to manage study alongside work and family, resonated with my own as a tertiary teacher also studying part-time. Their real-time feedback on the programmatic changes made within the Specialist Teaching programme was compelling; I did not want to wait until after I'd finished my research to respond to their feedback. For my Māori and Niuean participants, in particular, because knowledge is seen as most useful when it benefits the collective (Morrison & Vaioleti, 2011a), I felt a responsibility to reflect our time together in visible changes to our Specialist Teaching programme, community and pedagogy.

Given these relationships, my own transformative learning and my commitment to authentic practice, I was compelled to respond to their input into my practice and our programme in real time. So, whilst I had intended to listen to their stories from a distance, and to embed useful suggestions in due course, I felt morally obligated as a teacher on the programme, and as a researcher investigating it, to respond to their feedback through continuous cycles of development and reflection.

The following section outlines my overarching methodology of narrative inquiry, with an emphasis on the reflexive and participatory ways participants' narratives shaped my own narrative, as mine shaped theirs, and how our individual and collective themes shaped my practice context. This expanded methodology reflects the personal and professional growth of the participants, as well as my moral stance as an embedded researcher. Accordingly, this thesis is an authentic portrayal of the complex and iterative nature of this study.

Methodology

Situating the study – The significance for (re)emerging professionals

This research is situated within a social constructivist paradigm, where meaning is believed to be constructed through our interactions with others. This paradigm is heavily influenced by Vygotsky, who considered learning firstly as a collective activity, that then flowed to the individual (Stears, 2009). As such, this research sought to give voice to this group of students as they navigated their professional practice alongside postgraduate study. This study was highly contextualised, exploring participants' ideas in relation to their connections to others (colleagues; family members; friends; other students) and to their contexts (schools; home; community settings and so on). Using an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), the participants and I considered their links to the layers of their environments which revealed aspects of their identity, relationships and wellbeing (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013).

Professional fulfilment during and after study is a perennial concern of students and teacher educators (Flores & Day, 2006). The teachers in my study were not new to the profession, but had moved from the classroom into specialist teaching roles. They

were therefore often (re)experiencing that initial year of coming to grips with teaching and its concomitant influences on their wellbeing and identity. I wanted to explore the tensions within their lives, such as being asked to work in ways they did not fully endorse or to sideline practices they knew to be effective. This study examined the ways participants storied their lives, how they interrupted or challenged dominant perceptions of practice, and the impact this had on their wellbeing. “Narrative researchers frequently look for the collusive or resistant strategies that narrators develop in relation to the constraints of their narrative environments” (Chase, 2003, p. 75). I wanted to understand the exceptions to the rule, for example, people who challenged the way wellbeing was conceptualised, or crafted their own professional path in spite of pressure to do otherwise. I was also interested in how participants did this collectively, and the ways our focus group discussions shaped individual/group perspectives (O’Toole & Prince, 2015) and actions (Goodman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry interweaving biculturally responsive practices and positive psychology

Understanding meaning

The three lenses that had significant influence on my research were narrative inquiry, Māori ways of being and doing, and positive psychology; all three are steeped in sociocultural understandings of knowledge creation. Palmer (2007) summarises an idea inspired by C. Wright Mills’ discussions of ‘sociological imagination’. “We cannot see what is ‘out there’ merely by looking around. Everything depends on the lenses through which we view the world. By putting on new lenses, we can see things that would otherwise remain invisible” (p. 27).

These sociocultural lenses or perspectives on knowledge creation stand in contrast to cognitive and social cognitive theories, which emphasise the role of individual cognitive processes in meaning making. Whilst context is considered in cognitive theories, it is separate from the individual who ultimately considers and processes factors from layers of the environment to construct individual beliefs (Takahashi, 2011). Elevating cognition as the source of meaning-making risks losing sight of the meaning co-constructed by people in their communities of practice (Takahashi, 2011)

and the distributed ideas, expertise and resources that lie beyond individual minds (Edwards, 2005). Sociocultural perspectives, by contrast, view learning as occurring at the intersection of people and their social environments and “as mutually constitutive, whereby a person both composes and is composed by her social surroundings” (Takahashi, 2011, p. 733).

Applying these ideas to my research, participants engaged in a community of practice, their focus whānau group, as a way to more genuinely reflect social constructivist ways of knowing. Palmer argues that “knowing is always communal” as knowing “is a human way to seek relationship and, in the process, to have encounters and exchanges that will inevitably alter us” (2007, p. 55). Having the focus whānau group alongside the individual interviews helped tap into tacit as well as explicit knowledge; expertise as enacted in professional practice, and the dynamic and social nature of knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002). As with all communities of practice, our focus whānau group shifted knowledge from an object to “an integral part of their activities and interactions, and [whereby participants] serve as a living repository for that knowledge” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 9). The focus group sessions allowed participants to learn from one another in ways they could not through individual interviews.

Acknowledging intersubjectivity and the dynamic nature of meaning-making, I appreciated that people’s stories would be slightly different with each telling, influenced by the audience and the passage of time. I saw this as a richness, evidence of the dynamic nature of self-understanding, and tried to capture this in my retellings. Over the two years, I kept certain questions the same in each interview; we explored changes to participants’ perspectives and the influence of whānau group discussions on their thinking. Simultaneously, I was conscious of the parallel process that occurs for embedded researchers. I was continually influenced by recent articles and conversations; as such, I was a slightly different researcher in each interaction. In the spirit of transparency and knowledge sharing, I talked openly with participants about changes in my thinking. Whilst “every aspect of narrative work is interpretive” (Josselson, 2011, p. 38), I wanted to ensure participants understood I was co-constructing meaning with them in the moment and then co-constructing meaning across interviews through another layer of analysis.

Kincheloe warns that interpretation is present in all knowledge production. “As inhabitants of the world, researchers are oriented to it in a manner that prevents them from grounding their findings outside of it” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 329). I was deeply conscious of the difficulty in representing other people’s stories in enough detail, in the right details, and with the nuances needed to understand their perspectives. This was a highly challenging task, and I worked closely with the participants to try to get this right through narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is frequently used in education as a way to understand how teachers’ narratives shape their practices (Bell, 2002). As with other ethnographic approaches, “narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures” (Bell, 2002, p. 207). As a methodology, narrative inquiry is most concerned with how people make sense of their lives through language and stories (Casey, 1995). Unpacking these stories is useful in exploring people’s understandings, experiences and underlying assumptions (Bell, 2002).

Clandinin and Connolly, key contributors to the use of narrative inquiry in education, note:

Following Dewey, our principle interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author. Therefore, difficult as it may be to tell a story, the more difficult but important task is the retelling of stories that allow for growth and change. We imagine, therefore, that in the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story. (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, para. 34)

A narrative approach is uniquely suited to this study, as it honours the notion that our lives are storied, and the learning that occurs as we ‘story and re-story’ (p. 226) our experiences individually and together (Bishop, 2003). Narrative approaches allow for a broad look at our cultures, contexts and collective understandings as well. Language

and culture are inherently connected; one cannot learn language without learning culture (Faltis, 2008). Similarly, one cannot unpack language without unpacking culture and context. For this research in particular, narrative inquiry was perfectly suited as a way to explore the intersections between people's stories, their wellbeing and their developing identities (Chase, 2011).

For Māori, narrative inquiry is a culturally responsive approach, as it “seeks to establish collaborative narratives” and “has trust as its foundations” (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 8).

The process of whakawhanaungatanga is about establishing whānau relationship by asking a number of key questions – that is, who you are, where you come from and to whom you are connected, and this in turn leads to an unspoken relationship and commitment to other people. (Bishop, 1996, in Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 8)

Bell (1997, 2002) outlines the benefits of narrative inquiry as:

- Seeking to understand the *experience* itself, which can be minimised in studies focused solely on outcomes;
- Glimpsing understandings participants may not be consciously aware of, such as assumptions deeply held but rarely if ever articulated;
- Demonstrating the dynamic nature of our meaning making over time, with current impressions informed by past experiences and constantly reshaped by new experiences and stories.

Other advantages include the ability to elicit participant voice, to validate the experiences of those often underrepresented in research, and to establish a joint process between the researcher and the participants (Moriarty, 2011).

Bell (2002) outlines potential limitations of narrative inquiry as well. The time commitment limits narrative inquiry to studies with fewer participants, and the focus on the researcher as a fellow participant can be uncomfortable for some academics. Most important are the ethical issues, including the risk of imposing inaccurate

meanings on other people's lives, and maintaining boundaries within and after a research relationship made more intense through the sharing of personal stories. Consideration of these potential issues shaped the research design and ethics around this research. For me, understanding each participant's story in a rich and contextualised way was more important than being able to generalise to other people or contexts. Considerable time spent with a small group of participants was therefore most appropriate. Time was taken to build relationships and to clarify the boundaries of the relationships, and I continually reflected on how best to nurture the deepening relationship while sustaining appropriate boundaries.

As with biculturally responsive research and positive psychology, and for similar reasons of social justice, narrative inquiry has often focused on giving voice to those on the margins, representing those who have not always been part of the dominant story. Chase (2011) suggests an expanded focus in the field of narrative inquiry, aimed at documenting the contexts and the stories of that which is working well. She argues for a greater understanding of the narrative environments "that make possible and even encourage creative explorations of self, identity, community, and reality" (p. 76) and then reminds us "we have as much to learn from narrative inquiry into environments where something is working as we do from inquiry into environments where injustice reigns" (p. 76). My research sought to achieve this balance, articulating good examples of practice, identity and context whilst interrogating the structures that supported and hindered these practices. In this way, I hoped to contribute constructively to the *practice* of teaching and teacher education as well as the *theory*.

Participatory approaches to narrative inquiry

Participatory approaches to inquiry unify academics and practitioners (in my case specialist teachers also doing postgraduate study) in meaningful relationships as they collectively address a common problem, learn from the process as well as the product, and generate new knowledge in relevant and meaningful ways for both groups (Opsina et al., 2008). This approach closes the research-practice gap identified by Opsina et al. (2008), including university pressures to generate knowledge deemed important by select journals rather than practitioners; the related need to explore explicit action when practitioners are often more interested in the tacit understandings that are

more difficult to study; and the belief that universities generate knowledge to pass “downstream” (p. 133) to practitioners. I felt these pressures keenly as an early career academic and an emerging researcher; still, I was committed to conducting research in authentic ways and of real importance to the specialist teachers in my study.

Participatory forms of research are also more culturally responsive and effective than other approaches to research. *Ako* (reciprocal teaching and learning) emphasises the dynamic, active and shifting roles of teacher and learner within the learning process, as well as the inherent value of participants’ ways of making sense of their own lives (Bishop, 2003). *Ako* within the research process firmly positions learning and teaching within the participants as well as the researcher (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013) and allows for the collaborative storying of our realities (Bishop, 2003). Participatory narrative inquiry thereby “places the process of knowledge generation in the hands of ordinary practitioners and demystifies research by treating it as a form of learning” (Brooks & Watkins, 1994, in Ospina et al. 2008, p. 133). Inspired by the potential benefits for participants, I designed the study to genuinely include participants, recognise their unique contribution, and co-construct findings in which they could see themselves. This participatory approach also reflected biculturalism, as explained in the next section.

Biculturally responsive research – Whakawhanaungatanga

Qualitative research is often concerned with issues of social justice, whether the research is used to *document* social change or to *bring about* social change. These lofty aims often carry a sense of urgency: “The urgency to speak, to get heard, to develop collective narratives, and to create public dialogue – all of these are about the need to influence an audience” (Chase, 2011, p. 75). In Aotearoa New Zealand, powerful examples of research for social change can be found in *Kaupapa Māori*, research and theory based on Māori values and practices (re)shaping the research landscape in an education context frequently criticised for marginalising Māori (Hill, 2016; Smith, 2005a, 2005b). These indigenous methodologies honour Māori way of knowing, use collectivist approaches and seek to benefit all participants rather than just the researcher (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Hill, 2016). Central to these aims, assert Bishop and

Glynn (1999), is distributing the power and control of the research process and meaning-making to promote *tinu rangatiratanga* (self-determination) of Māori people.

In order to be considered Kaupapa Māori research, it must be conducted by Māori researchers, driven by Māori participants, and benefit Māori (Bevan-Brown, personal communication, 2016). Non-Māori researchers can strive to incorporate biculturally responsive practices (e.g. Hill, 2016), but cannot conduct Kaupapa Māori research. As such, I have framed my research as ‘biculturally responsive’ to connote my commitment as a Treaty partner.

Under the broad umbrella of Kaupapa Māori research, Bishop and Glynn (1999) identified *whakawhanaungatanga* (building relationships) as a critical research method. In research, whakawhanaungatanga includes extensive and ongoing relationship building; working within Māori contexts to further devolve the power historically associated with research; and for the researcher to see her/himself within the research process “physically, ethically, morally and spiritually and not just as a ‘researcher’ concerned with methodology” (p. 170). Again, non-Māori researchers can be influenced by these ideas but should explicitly acknowledge that theirs is not Kaupapa Māori research. I strived to incorporate whakawhanaungatanga into my research as it genuinely fit with the priorities of the study: sharing power and knowledge for the good of group; participating in a community which was inherently uplifting; exploring real-life ecologies from as many perspective as possible, and working together for the good of current and future students and professionals in inclusive education.

In their community-based work with Māori, Jones et al. also emphasised the centrality of whakawhanaungatanga to project outcomes:

As a consequence, each (participant) has a genuine connection with the other (participants) and with the research(er). Establishment of these bonds means that each party is committed to upholding the *mana* [dignity, personal power] of the other. ... Allowing the time and space to develop these relationships is not an indulgence, an excess, a luxury or an optional

extra: it is absolutely fundamental to the success of the project. (Jones et al., 2006, p. 70)

The whānau groups described earlier sit well with biculturally responsive practice where learners benefit from a place and sense of belonging (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013). For the purposes of this research, in the spirit of whakawhanaungatanga, a focus whānau support group was formed. Termly gatherings were scheduled, to build relationships and trust, and to deepen our conversations through “connectedness, engagement and involvement with others in order to promote self-determination, agency and voice” (Bishop, 2003, p. 228).

Positive psychology

As discussed in the Literature Review, positive psychology has shifted the focus of research from deficits to the prevention of difficulties and growth of competencies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Researchers can bring out the positive by focusing on the positive, and work in ways that help people reconstruct their lives in terms of strengths, optimism and meaningfulness (Seligman, 2004, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In their study of teacher retention, Day et al. (2005) underscore the importance of framing research in constructive ways by focusing on commitment rather than stress. “If we focus on the issue of stress we are in danger of adopting a deficit model or professional practice in which the research endeavour is to identify what is missing and find ways to replace what is missing” (p. 564). In a study of wellbeing, there was a similar risk of dwelling on that which was not working, or missing, as participants contrasted their experiences with idealised lives.

To mitigate this risk, my study was infused with positive psychology explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, I constructed strengths-based interviews which elicited positive stories of participants and their lives. Questions focused on what has worked, what could work and what each of us needs to be successful as students and professionals. I was most interested in what had gone well in participants’ lives and in their practice. Thus, we explored times of wellbeing, stories of practices that felt most authentic to them, and the supportive aspects within and around these individuals that may have contributed to these scenarios. We examined the tensions in their personal and

professional lives, but always from a position of agency. Specifically, we unpacked the ways they positioned themselves against the tensions effectively, what fortified them, when they were most successful in ‘practising fiercely’ or giving their all to their practice. In this way, we interrogated the difficult times and practices but in ways that empowered the person within and beyond the interview by focusing on triumph rather than defeat. We explored the positive aspects of their identity, with a focus on growth and change. When we looked at what held them back, internally and in their contexts, we did so with presumptions of competence and the possibility of change.

Implicitly, I regarded each person as being their own best teacher, and having more wisdom than they might realise. I used our time together to hold up a mirror to that wisdom, in ways that lifted the person as well as the study. Participants left with a renewed and elevated understanding of their unique gifts and perspectives, and the ways these dispositions had fortified their practice. According to Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992, in Chase, 2011, p. 68) self-narration has the potential to be emancipatory; re-storying one’s experiences can lead to new meanings and freedom from less useful versions of one’s story. They argue that the narrator is also the audience; they are creating but also hearing alternate versions of their own life. This process can be incredibly powerful, especially when space, undivided attention and positive regard are part of the process. As a researcher, I actively facilitated “people’s sense of developing themselves as agentic and of having an authentic voice” (Bishop and Glynn, 1999, p. 174) by honouring their knowledge of themselves and their contexts, and their ability to co-construct both our understandings and our research relationship.

Participatory research should be reciprocally beneficial; as such, a goal of the present study was to empower my participants, supporting them to fortify their identities, practice and wellbeing. Glynn (2015) warns that the concept of ‘empowering’ implies that one group is weaker or has less power; instead we must engage in authentic power sharing. “We need to position ourselves as unknowing rather than expert, as responsive rather than directive, and as listening more than talking” (Glynn et al., 2001, in Glynn, 2015, p. 171). Strengths-based questions supported participants to foreground their strengths, and to further their self-understanding based on these

strengths. Although we discussed barriers, we did this through the lens of growth, with queries such as “What have you learned from overcoming these barriers?” As much as I wanted to gain knowledge from this research, I did not want to do it in ways that might deflate my participants or trample on their *mana*. Through an appreciative stance, I hoped to meet the aims of the research while providing my participants with something valuable for their own development.

Methods

Ethical procedures and informed consent

A full ethics application was submitted for the October 2013 Massey University Human Ethics Committee meeting. The ethics committee requested a teleconference to further discuss this research, primarily due to the relationship between researcher and participants. Following written feedback from the ethics committee, the application was revised and resubmitted. Full ethics approval was gained in November 2013.

Pertinent ethical issues, considered and addressed, are outlined in Table 4. As indicated, the most important ethical considerations were clarity of my role as a teacher-researcher and protection of participants.

Table 4. Consideration and resolution of ethical issues

| | |
|--|---|
| Role clarity | Continual care was taken to ensure staff and students understood the distinction between this research and my regular teaching duties, and to preserve appropriate relationships with participants during and after the study. |
| Selection of participants | Having an independent research officer introduce the research to students mitigated any potential sense of coercion to participate. Of the students who volunteered, a matrix was used for purposive sampling, and all students were told that they were selected/not selected based on their fit with other participants. Students not selected were encouraged to participate in the usual whānau group structure, as a way to enlist support and share their insights, as well as to benefit from the study more peripherally. |
| Protection for students participating in the study | Students understood that participation, non-participation or withdrawal from the study would in no way affect their grades or coursework. Their time commitment to the study was minimal, in consideration for the other demands on their time. I did not mark participant's assignments. |
| Confidentiality of participation | The anonymity of students participating in the study was maintained; pseudonyms were used in all data linked to them. Participants engaged with their regular whānau group structure, and in an additional focus whānau group/ closed online forum known only to the members of the group. |
| Equity for students not participating in the study | Students not participating in the study still benefited from the whānau group structure. Participants wishing to withdraw from the study could still avail themselves of their local whānau group. |
| Burden on fellow teaching staff | Marking of assignments was allocated across enough people that my inability to mark the work of participating students did not tax my colleagues. As the person who coordinated the marking, I was able to distribute assignments within the marking team without identifying the participants in my study. |

In the spirit of educated consent as an extension of informed consent, I continually revisited participants' understanding and consent throughout the study. This was important, as informed consent is predicated on an assumption that we as researchers can answer every question a participant might ask at the outset of a study (Chase, 2011). As Lieblich argued in her conversation with Clandinin and Murphy (2007), narrative researchers cannot always anticipate the ways they will use data. Therefore,

it was important to return to participants to assure their continued and educated consent of their information in the ways it would *actually* be used. I felt this obligation keenly, as my participants trusted me in part because I was their tertiary teacher and had the implied trust of a postgraduate programme. To honour that trust, I revisited consent each time I saw each person. Towards the end of 2015, as I became more clear about what data I might use and how, I negotiated the specifics with each participant as part of their ongoing and educated consent.

An example of responding to these ongoing negotiations is the way the participants are collectively introduced in the study. Whilst I had hoped to foreground the explicit ways each person had contributed, in part to reinforce that these ideas came from fifteen inquirers rather than one, the consensus was that this was not necessary or even helpful. They preferred to be described collectively in ways that foregrounded their common interests, roles and contributions and in ways that painted a picture of their diversity whilst protecting their anonymity.

Prior to each initial interview, we revisited information on the study and discussed any questions or concerns. Participants signed the *Participant Interview Consent Form* (Appendix B) to indicate that they understood the project and their contribution to the project; their initial questions had been answered; their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without penalty; conversations would be recorded and accessed only by myself and the transcriber; and that transcripts could be returned to the participant for editing if they wished. Participants also signed a *Focus Group Participant Consent Form* (Appendix C), which indicated their understanding of the additional need to preserve anonymity of the other participants by not disclosing the membership of the private online forum or focus group, or the content of focus group discussions. They also understood that focus group conversations could be used as data.

The Specialist Teaching programme is unique within Aotearoa New Zealand and therefore easily identifiable. Permission to conduct this research, with the programme named explicitly, was sought and gained from the director of the Specialist Teaching

programme, the coordinators from both Massey University and University of Canterbury, and the hosting college/Institute within each university.

Finding participants

In selecting participants, my foremost consideration was weaving the study into existing coursework and course structures, so that focusing on wellbeing as a research participant did not diminish the actual wellbeing of the participants. This intention influenced the selection of participants, as well as the number and length of interviews and focus group sessions.

A research officer independent of the programme shared information about this study with all Specialist Teaching postgraduate students at the block course in February 2014 and asked for any person interested in participating to contact me. An *Information Sheet* (Appendix D) was made available to all students. Subsequently, nineteen students expressed interest in participating. In 2015, a similar process was followed: the same independent research officer shared information about this study, and five students expressed interest in participating.

In the first iteration of the study in 2014, I hoped to solicit ten participants. A cohort of ten would allow for in-depth relationship-building and interviewing, provide a comfortable group size, and serve as a buffer for any attrition. As nineteen people volunteered to take part in the present study, purposive sampling was possible. I chose participants from each of the two Specialist Teaching cohorts by considering ways they might add to the whole of the research group, in order to include the most varied voices possible. I sought diversity in age, gender, professional role, practice context, support network, belief systems and lifestyles. Additionally, I wanted to include voices from non-dominant cultures: to add richness and complexity to the study, to avoid making monocultural interpretations, and to draw on more the holistic aspects of wellbeing and identity sometimes neglected in dominant western understandings. In 2015, in response to the invitation to join the second iteration of the study, only five students expressed interest in participating and so all five were welcomed into the research.

I had hoped to include men and women to explore gender-specific considerations around wellbeing and authentic practice. However, this proved impossible in a programme dominated by women (women comprised 90% of the overall ST student population in 2014, and 89% in 2015) and when no males volunteered to participate. Additionally, although it was hard to predict or solicit explicitly, I hoped to include participants who were more and less well themselves, and more and less focused on wellbeing in their own lives. Finding people less focused on wellbeing was difficult because many volunteered precisely because the inquiry fitted with their personal interest in the topic.

Fourteen students participated in the study, and each person chose their own pseudonym. Māori participants were offered the opportunity to use their real name for reasons of *whakapapa* (honouring those who came before them) but declined. The participants ranged in age from early 20s to mid 60s. Three identified as Māori and one identified as Niuean; four had immigrated to Aotearoa New Zealand (from China, India, England and Scotland) and the others were Aotearoa New Zealand-born. They all lived in the wider Auckland area, with nine working as itinerant specialist teachers and five based in schools or site-based specialist service providers.

As a group, they represented professionals in their early, mid and late careers. Some were new to their current role, while others had worked in the role for years. They had varying degrees of enthusiasm for their current jobs, with several participants switching jobs during the two years of the study. They also varied in their enthusiasm for postgraduate study. For nine of the participants, the two-year postgraduate study was a compulsory condition of employment in their new role. Within this group of nine, reactions to compulsory study ranged from taking the job in part because it was accompanied by intensive professional development to viewing the study as an unwanted complication in their lives.

Bella, the youngest person in the study, withdrew after the first interview due to her belief that she did not yet have enough to contribute. Lola left her job and the postgraduate study at the end of 2014 and moved to the United States. Finella withdrew from the research in 2014 when she left the Specialist Teaching study;

returning to the study in 2015, she requested to rejoin the research. Of the original fourteen participants, twelve remained in the study until its conclusion, as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5. Research participants

| 2014 Year 2 | 2014 Year 1 | 2015 Year 2 | 2015 Year 1 | 2015 Former students |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Mia | Hannah | Hannah | Daphne | Mia |
| Sam | Friend | Friend | Finella | Sam |
| Ruth | Bella* | | Sandra | Ruth |
| Zena | Lola** | | Katie | Zena |
| Belinda | | | Kirsten | Belinda |

* Withdrew from the study

** Resigned from role, moved away

Data collection methods

Data were collected over two years. Participation included pre- and post-interviews each year; focus groups, and the co-development of a theoretical framework for supporting the practice and wellbeing of specialist teachers. Sources of data are outlined in Table 6, and the evolving focus of the research is displayed visually in Figure 3.

Table 6. Sources of interview and focus group data

| Participant | Pre-2014 | Post-2014 | Focus Group 2014 | Pre-2015 | Post-2015 | Focus Group 2015 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------|----------|-----------|------------------|
| Year 2 in 2014 | | | | | | |
| Mia | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Sam | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Ruth | X | X | X | | *** | X |
| Zena | X | X | X | | X | |
| Belinda | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Year 1 in 2014 and Year 2 in 2015 | | | | | | |
| Hannah | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Friend | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Bella | X | * | | | | |
| Lola | X | | X | ** | | |
| Year 1 in 2015 | | | | | | |
| Daphne | | | | X | X | X |
| Finella | | | | X | X | X |
| Sandra | | | | X | X | |
| Katie | | | | X | X | X |
| Kirsten | | | | X | X | X |

* Withdrew from the study

** Resigned from role, move away

*** Major surgery at the end of 2015

In 2014, nine participants (Year 1 and 2 Specialist Teaching students) engaged in an Auckland-based whānau support group. In 2015, five new Year 1 students joined the study; this allowed me to share, verify and refine the theoretical framework with professionals who were not involved in its early development. Having a second group of participants feed into the research supported the credibility and transferability of the study and led to a more robust final framework. In 2015, the subgroup of five students who had graduated in 2014 (former Year 2 students) remained in the study, as it was crucial to explore their post-study transition to full-time professional practice “as part and parcel of the construct of a professional identity as a [specialist] teacher” (Abrandt Dahlgren & Hammar Chiriac, 2009, p. 992). As they had practised for years prior to returning to study, established long-standing patterns around practice and wellbeing, and then experienced two years of study alongside their ongoing professional practice, exploring their ongoing transformation was invaluable in creating a robust and sustainable framework.



Figure 3. Depiction of methods and focus

Research interviews

In 2014 and 2015, research interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of each year, at times and places of each participant's choosing. Typically, this was at kitchen tables in their homes or libraries near to their work, with a few interviews in meeting rooms at their office, cafes or parks. The shortest interviews were 30-40 minutes during participants' lunch hours; the longest were 90 minutes. I brought food or coffee to each meeting, in appreciation of their time, and as a tangible way of acknowledging that I was a "visitor in someone else's cultural space" (Glynn, 2015, p. 174).

I did not give participants the questions ahead of time. I wanted to minimise the additional time people gave to my study, and avoid implying that preparation was required or that 'right answers' should be brought into the discussion. More fundamentally, I believe that meaning is co-constructed in our interactions with others. The interview created a space for fresh and deep discussion that could go in a hundred different ways; the magic was in the interactions and in the meaning we found together.

Interviews as conversations

The interviews were conceptualised as deep conversations (Kovach, 2010). I worked to shift the dynamic from interviewer-interviewee to listener and narrator, and to a conversation between co-inquirers. In the time it took to shift to narrator-listener, I tried to cultivate honesty, openness and reciprocity. For Māori, knowledge is sacred "and is to be treasured and protected for the benefit of the group, and not for the individual" (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p. 172). I wanted to create a space for expansive dialogue, and suggest its importance for the group, even in the initial interviews when there was not yet a deep rapport between myself and the participants.

Chase (2003, 2011) notes this is best achieved with subtle shifts away from traditional interviewing techniques. Rather than asking narrators to generalise about life experiences, the listener invites them to share specific stories. In doing so, the interview schedule is seen less as a script and more "as a guide that may or may not be useful when one follows the narrator's story" (Chase, 2011, p. 61). My participants

were invited to share stories of their lives and their practices in relation to a few strengths-based questions (e.g. “Tell me about a time when your practice felt the most authentic to you.”)

The dimensions of the interview schedule related to intra- and interpersonal aspects of their lives, wellbeing and professional practice. Care was taken to allow think time and periods of silence, and other techniques that prevented me from any tendency to “swamp the conversation” (Bishop, 2003, p. 231). Participants were also “free to move onto discussion which they identified as being important to them” (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 5) ensuring the conversation went in the directions most meaningful to each person.

These conversations explored the different and sometimes competing discourses in participants’ lives, including those found in their personal and professional roles, and in their own wellbeing. This included discussions of the ways participants challenged tacit policies and practices that reinforce people for working long hours rather than caring for themselves. They also shared their strategies for challenging views of their role that inhibit their authentic practice (e.g. pressure to ‘fix’ the child) and the impact this had on their wellbeing.

Developing semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E) supported me to clarify in my own mind what I wanted to know, provided a check-list of topics I hoped to cover in the course of a more natural dialogue, and gave me something to fall back on during lulls in the conversation. Following the participant’s lead allowed for power sharing within the interview, and positioned their inquiries alongside my own. Additionally, I disclosed some of the tensions in my own life, as a student and professional, and answered the questions they asked of me. As Jones et al. (2006) note, in their culturally responsive research project, “we must be willing to share enough of ourselves to allow others to develop trust in us as researchers, and in the structures and processes that have been established to protect the knowledge that we are working with” (p. 69).

I followed the interview schedule most closely in the first interview with each person, when we were less comfortable with each other and I was less confident in my role as

a researcher. In subsequent interviews, we had developed trust and rapport, and I had reviewed their earlier transcript(s) prior to re-meeting with them. I often had specific follow-up questions for particular people, based on their earlier stories. They also had certain things they wanted to share with me, having remained interested in our co-inquiry in between conversations. All of these considerations, along with a growing confidence as a researcher that allowed me a certain confidence in deviating from the script, allowed us to cover key areas in fluid and responsive ways.

In creating this constructive and safe space, I have drawn on culturally responsive practices to the extent that it is possible for a non-Māori person to do so. *Manaaki tāngata* connotes collaboration and reciprocity, emphasises giving back to the wider community, and “acknowledges that learning and teaching exist in both the student and the teacher” (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013, p. 9) For me, manaaki tāngata involved (re)positioning the participants as narrators and myself as the listener; allowing their interests and stories to guide the session as much as my own questions did, and redistributing power in the relationship to establish us as co-inquirers into the research (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

Focus groups

Along with interviews at the beginning and end of each year, participants came together as a whānau support group. In 2014, the group met in May, July, August and October. In 2015, the five incoming participants joined the existing group and meetings were held in July, September and October. Except for the more formal October meetings, these gatherings were informal, hosted in the homes of the participants over a shared meal. There was no set agenda, as these gatherings were essentially about whakawhanaungatanga: the building of relationships, trust and community. This ‘work before the work’ (Palmer, 2009, p. 103) was consistent for Māori ways of collaborating (Bevan-Brown, 2001; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013), which emphasise “an abiding concern for the quality of human relationships that need to be established and maintained if learning contexts are to be effective” (Macfarlane et al., 2008, p. 105).

Research done through focus groups allows for pedagogy, activism and interpretive inquiry; and whilst each of these elements is present the weightings may shift (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 545). Engaging with a whānau group was a familiar process; as noted earlier, every Specialist Teaching student in the has access to such a group as their local, face-to-face and interprofessional community of practice. Participants in my study often remained in their local group as well, and joined our focus whānau group with its additional focus on wellbeing, authentic practice and professional identity. The group met informally three times in the first year before coming together for the formal focus group in October, and twice in the second year before the final focus group. The focus of these sessions is depicted in Figure 3.

There is a need for research which challenges the hierarchy between researchers and participants (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Ospina et al., 2008) balances task completion with caring and support, and is equally focused on individual and collective gains (Macfarlane et al., 2008). These focus whānau group meetings attempted to achieve these aims, creating a space where all voices were equally valued and understandings were co-constructed through individual sharing and collective meaning making.

Two of the whānau group meetings were delineated as focus whānau group meetings, where the purpose was pre-determined and directly related to the research (October 2014 and October 2015). Prior to the 2014 meeting, tentative themes from the first round of interviews were shared with the participants to prepare them for collectively exploring, amending and verifying the themes. This was done through a shared Google document which allowed for simultaneous editing by all members of the group. A similar process was followed for the 2015 meeting, whereby I recorded a 10-minute video overviewing the draft conceptual framework. Both focus group meetings were recorded and transcribed by the researcher; these data were used to further hone the themes and the way they have had been shaped by collective thinking and interpretation. These understandings were then used to create the conceptual framework *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina* that came out of this research. This framework will be discussed more fully in Chapters 6 and 7.

First focus whānau group session – October 2014

The formal focus group was distinguished from previous whānau group meetings in several ways. It was hosted at the university rather than participants' homes, food was catered, and information and an agenda were distributed beforehand. We revisited consent, and audiotaped the session. Participants understood that this more formal space was created for the sharing of ideas and co-constructing of knowledge more specifically around the research questions. Additionally, I used the structured concept mapping tool Ketso® (Furlong & Tippett, 2013) to guide the session.

Ketso® was developed as a democratic approach to mapping concepts, group planning and other participatory teaching and research. Ketso® is described as a “systems thinking framework to develop an integrated approach to planning, which integrates effective participatory approaches within ecological design” (Tippett, Handley, & Ravetz, 2007). In contrast to processes which elicit feedback on pre-formed ideas, this framework supports participants to develop their own thinking, and to collaborate in ways that genuinely bring local knowledge to solution-finding (Tippett et al., 2007, p. 9).

In line with the research of Tippett et al. (2007) we considered our collective ecologies “as a source of inspiration, ... as a vibrant model for new possibilities” and our time together as helping to “re-embed [us] into the workings of the natural system” (2007, p. 85). My participants and I were embedded in the same practice and study contexts, and sought to examine the layers of our ecology in participatory and holistic ways. We had established collective ways of working, and celebrated that our ideas were influencing the postgraduate programme of which we were a part.

We needed a framework for connecting participants' personal experiences more widely to the layers of their postgraduate study and professional practice. As shown in Figure 4, the tool provided a level of structure for pulling together ideas and a platform for discussion. Importantly, all group members contributed to the co-construction, as opposed to the narrower and potentially biased insights of just one scribe (Whitworth, Torras I Calvo, Moss, Amlsom Kifle & Blåsternes, 2014). In this way, meanings were socially constructed through the process, allowing participants to “learn from each

other, thus developing new models of reality” (Tippett et al., 2007, p. 86). Further, as the data were available to everyone at the table, participants could make individual and collective decisions about what was meaningful to their lives outside of the research (Whitworth et al., 2014).



Figure 4. Ketso® diagram

The 2014 focus whānau group meeting was held in a large seminar room at the university library. Three days before the meeting, participants received a draft agenda as well as access to an editable Google document where I had collated the initial themes emerging from our interviews. An editable document emphasised both the draft nature of these ideas and each participant’s power in shaping our emerging and collective thinking.

Participants arrived on the day to a room with four stations, and a whiteboard with the draft agenda. On the first table was a hard copy of the draft themes and a *koha* (gift) in appreciation for them giving their time on a Saturday at the end of term. Skype was set up at one place at the table, to include Mia who joined from a distance. We began our three-hour focus group session at this table, first clarifying and revising the agenda which consisted of: welcome and *karakia* (prayer); reintroductions to each other, the

study and the day; considering the themes; lunch; considering the implications for postgraduate programmes; conclusion.

Following the welcome, karakia and reintroductions, I shared with the group my process of developing these emerging themes. The second station was set up using one Ketso® entitled “Themes” with branches named Professional Identity, Authentic Practice and Wellbeing, with a fourth branch left blank to encourage participants to identify any overarching constructs we had not yet considered. I provided a brief summary of the creation of Ketso®, my intentions for this session on Themes and the process we would use to revise and verify the three overarching constructs as well as the emerging themes. Specifically, we endeavoured to clarify the themes and the connections between them, priorities within the themes, and images or metaphors that would exemplify these ideas.

Each person was given a black marker and a pile of green leaves, with green signifying *new ideas*. Existing themes (identified and revised through our Google document) were written onto brown leaves (brown signifying the fertile soil from which our ideas would come). These leaves sat on the side of the Ketso® for everyone to see and access. We began with Hannah, asking her to choose one of the themes that resonated for her. Hannah chose “connectedness”. Each participant then spent a few minutes recording her own perspective on “connectedness” in relation to these larger ideas of authentic practice, wellbeing and professional identity. Hannah shared her thoughts around connectedness and placed the brown leaf on the Ketso® mat where she thought it fitted. Each person shared their own ideas around connectedness, placing their leaves closer or further from Hannah’s and from the three overarching themes. This process is captured in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Participants engaging in one Ketso® activity

My role was to summarise people's ideas, encourage others to expand on these ideas and to keep the session moving at an appropriate pace. The group spent one hour on this first Ketso® before breaking for lunch, then completed the second and third Ketsos®. The fourth station also displayed one Ketso®, with a different configuration of branches. This Ketso® was named *Implications for the Specialist Teaching programme*, as depicted in Figure 6. As it was an inductive session, eight equidistant branches were placed around the base of the tree, but these branches were not named. I overviewed the purpose of each colour leaf in the order we would engage with them:



Figure 6. Ketso® on Implications for the Specialist Teaching Programme

A Ketso® legend sat in one corner of the table. As shown in Table 7, the legend outlined the sequence and purpose of each leaf.

Table 7. Ketso® legend for participants (2014)

| | |
|---------------|---|
| YELLOW LEAVES | Vision (goals) <i>What would it look like to have authentic practice, wellbeing and a professional identity?</i> <i>What would the programme look like, if it well and truly supported these?</i> <i>What would our courses look like?</i> <i>What would our student support look like?</i> <i>What would our graduates look like?</i> |
| BROWN LEAVES | Current Strengths <i>What do we already do well?</i> |
| GREEN LEAVES | Future Possibilities, New Ideas <i>How might we build on these strengths?</i> <i>What could be done differently?</i> |
| GREY LEAVES | Barriers, Tensions <i>What are the barriers to achieving our vision/goals?</i> |

The group worked through these leaves in the following order: green (future possibilities); yellow (our measure of success); grey (problems and limits); green and brown (strategies for reducing or removing these barriers). For each leaf/aspect, one person offered to go first, and placed a leaf on the table as they expanded upon their ideas. Then each person who had a similar leaf/idea placed their leaf near to the first leaf. In this way, clumps of leaves indicated ideas endorsed by more people and provided us with a way of prioritising ideas as the ones generated independently and collectively by the most people. As one illustration of this, a leaf might say “Community of Practice”. Leaves noting similar ideas (e.g., “networks”) might be placed right next to the first leaf, while the author explained the similarities and points of difference between her idea and the original idea.

When one idea was exhausted, another person would place a leaf with a different idea somewhere on the mat. Again, the group went around sharing and expanding on ideas. When all leaves of one colour were placed on the mat, I summarised the discussion, ensured everyone had said what they’d wanted to say, and then shifted the group to a different aspect of our discussion (and a new leaf colour).

When the fourth and final station reached a natural conclusion, the group came back to the first table to draw the session to a close. We reflected on the value of our focus group meeting and the next steps, specifically that I would be meeting with each of them in November/December for our 2014 post-interviews. We also co-constructed a plan for 2015, in terms of their continued involvement and the inclusion of five new students for the following year. Each person confirmed their continued participation as well as the importance of including five new people. Specifically, they noted the importance of new perspectives on professional practice alongside study, as the programme and the education sector continued to evolve.

Second focus whānau group session – October 2015

The second focus group meeting was held in October 2015. My overarching objective for this final focus group was to share the conceptual framework *Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*, and to verify that every participant could indeed see themselves and their ideas within the penultimate framework. Flyvberg (2006) warns

of the ‘bias toward verification’ in social sciences research, wherein the validity of studies is undermined by researchers’ tendencies to confirm their own preconceived notions (p. 17). I wanted to check my own biases, and ensure that I had not cherry picked from the data to prove that which I had always intended to ‘find’.

One of the participants, Sam, kindly offered to help me construct the focus group agenda and structure ahead of time. We spent two hours together the week before the meeting, and drafted the process which was then used on the day. The agenda for the final focus group meeting included: welcome and karakia, reminder of the Ketso® process; and time at each Ketso® with a break for lunch. Four Ketsos® were used, exploring, in this order, ideas around: stance; stamina; supports, and tensions, as well as how participants positioned themselves against the tensions.

Because my intention was to check that the conceptual framework did indeed feel authentic to each person who had helped me construct it, I wanted to give them time to consider it before we came together. A video and draft agenda were sent out a week prior to coming together. The a 10-minute video featured me talking through the process, including the interviews and analysis of interviews, and how it led into these ideas around fulfilment, stance, stamina and support. I also walked them through a proposed structure for the final focus group, to give them time to reflect on these ideas and how they might contribute. Lastly, I suggested they might (re)consider their metaphors from earlier interviews, and whether these still served and were served by the emerging conceptual framework.

Chapter 4 and 5 outline the findings from 2014, gained through focus groups and individual interviews. Chapters 6 and 7 summarise the findings from the second phase of the study as well as the resulting conceptual framework *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*.

Use of metaphor as a research method

Metaphors were an important source of data in both interviews and focus groups. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) have highlighted the fundamental way metaphors support humans to make meaning, most notably serving as mental models that influence our

perceptions (Tippett et al., 2007, p. 72). Metaphors also work as “mechanisms for understanding experience” (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 764) because they tap into ways of knowing that teachers may not be able to articulate yet (Schön, 1995). Like Schön, Hunt (2006, in Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011) found that metaphors can make the implicit explicit, as intuitive knowledge is conveyed around professional practice.

Thomas and Beauchamp’s (2011) work is particularly relevant to this study, as they used metaphors to explore changes in teachers’ professional identity. Immediately after graduation from initial teacher education, and then again mid-way through their first year in the classroom, teachers were asked “What metaphor would you use to describe yourself as a teacher at this time?” (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 764). They explained:

It is not easy to describe one’s identity when asked to do so in so many words. ... Direct questions about identity tended to elicit responses related to roles one fulfils or activities one engages in, ‘the what’ rather than ‘the who’. ... [Using metaphor] brought the response back to ‘the who’, and permitted an enlightening glimpse into the complex and multi-faceted notion of identity. (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 764)

As such, metaphors were invited in the first interviews, and revisited in subsequent interviews. Initially these were metaphors of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing, and the connections between them. Later, these were metaphors of fulfilment through stance, supports and stamina. As a way of (re)introducing themselves to the final focus group, each person shared the metaphor they had created for *fulfilment through stance, stamina and supports* with the rest of the group. This activity deepened the ensuing conversation and trust levels considerably. In this way, metaphors served as a way of connecting people as well as ideas. The Ketso® framework reinforced the value of metaphor; designed as leaves on the branches of a tree, it animates and operationalises ecological ways of thinking and planning (Tippett et al., 2007, p. 79).

Matters of trustworthiness

In a constructivist paradigm, issues of reliability and validity are viewed differently from other methodologies and in relation to the overall purpose of postmodern research. In the social sciences, postmodern researchers:

offer indeterminacy rather than determinism, diversity rather than unity, difference rather than synthesis, complexity rather than simplification. They look to the unique rather than to the general, to the intertextual relations rather than causality, and to the unrepeatable rather than the reoccurring, the habitual or the routine. (Rosenau, 2001, p. 8)

Cope (2014) unpacks the five criteria of trustworthiness, put forward by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 and revised in 1994 to include *authenticity*. In respect to *credibility*, research should ring true for participants; future readers should also be able to recognise themselves in the narrative. *Dependability* connotes constancy, whereby others concur with the decisions and interpretations made throughout the research process. *Transferability* refers to the ability of others to find meaning in the research findings; *confirmability* ensures that findings represent the beliefs of the participants rather than the preconceived ideas of the researcher. *Authenticity* reflects researchers' faithfulness to the essence of participants' experiences, and provide rich enough accounts for future readers to grasp the experience.

Rallis, Rossman and Dajda (2007) argue that discussions of trustworthiness in qualitative data have focused on the procedural and technical, to the detriment of relational matters of trustworthiness. The authors define relational matters as the "long-term, thoughtful, and sensitive relationships that build as part of sustained research or evaluation work" (p. 405). In line with this focus on relationships, Tuhiwai Smith (2005, p. 98) outlines key cultural values necessary in research alongside Māori. Considered together with the five principles of trustworthy research, with an emphasis on relational matters, these values served as a key tool for developing my knowledge, practice and research design in ways that shared power with all my participants. Examples of the ways I enacted these values and criteria are provided in Table 8.

Table 8. Key cultural values, their alignment with principles of trustworthiness, and their enactment in the research

| Key Cultural Value | Alignment with Principles of Trustworthy Research | Enactment in the Research |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Aroha ki te tangata</i> Respect for participants, support to participate on their own terms | Credibility Authenticity | Participants were encouraged to take the conversation in directions that were meaningful to them (Rawlings & Wilson, 2013) which made the interviews less formal, more flexible and responsive, and encouraged more genuine sharing. Time, place and length of session depended on what participants wanted from our time together (longer to flesh out ideas and build the relationship; shorter if discrete commitment alongside work commitments). |
| <i>He kanohi kitea</i> Do as much as possible face to face | Credibility Confirmability Authenticity | Invited participation in the research only after students had a sense of me two days into the block course (Bevan-Brown, 2001). Drawing on Mead's (2003) work, Jones et al. note the importance of <i>he kanohi i kitea</i> (a face seen) where participants get to know the researcher enough to trust in the work, in the person behind the role and in the safeguards built into the research process (2006, p. 67). Fostering relationships amongst participants to create a rich, dynamic and safe space for co-constructing knowledge in the formal focus groups each October (Goodman, 2008; Rallis et al., 2007; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). |
| <i>Titiro, whakarongo ... kōrero</i> Observing and listening so that later dialogue comes from a place of understanding | Credibility Confirmability Authenticity | Time was taken for whanaungatanga; we began with what was important to the person, including locating their families/whānau geographically and as part of their own story (Bevan-Brown, 2001; Rallis et al., 2007). Worked first to understand each person, their priorities and concerns; found connections with my research that were of importance to them (Bevan-Brown, 2001). Interviews were structured to allow for deep exploration of individual experiences during postgraduate study. Listened with "willingness to put the other's story at the centre of one's attention, to resist defensive reactions and to acknowledge the limits of one's ability to put oneself in another's shoes" (Chase, 2010 in Chase, 2013, p. 70). Verified research findings with participants individually and collectively (Cope, 2014). |
| <i>Manaaki ki te tangata</i> Being generous and supportive, caring for one's participants | Credibility Dependability Confirmability Transferability Authenticity | The dimensions related to intra- and interpersonal aspects of their lives, wellbeing and professional practice. Collaborative process where every voice was valued and space was created for the two-way sharing of thoughts and ideas (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Goodman, 2008). "[Gave] voice' and validate[d] the experiences of people. ... Work[ed] with participants so the resulting work |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | | <p>represented a joint process between researchers and participants” (Moriarty, 2011, p. 23).</p> <p>New insights were brought back to the individual and the group, and infused into the Specialist Teaching programme in real-time as a way to demonstrate the study’s benefits to the participants as part of my own commitment to authentic practice.</p> <p>Open-ended questions and opportunities to change the shape and direction of the conversations allowed participants to co-create the value of our time together.</p> <p>Decision to forego final conversation with participant out of respect for her health, wellbeing and a whānau member in hospital.</p> |
| <p><i>Kia tupato</i> Be cautious, astute and reflective</p> | <p>Credibility Confirmability Authenticity</p> | <p>Positioned myself as an ally and a Treaty partner (Glynn, 2015) through knowledge and cultural advice, seeking feedback from my participants, and creating a space and relationship through which they could tell me when I had misunderstood what they were communicating.</p> <p>Describing how conclusions were reached; substantiated with data (Cope, 2014)</p> <p>Demonstrated effective engagement, methods and audit trails (Cope, 2014)</p> |
| <p><i>Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata</i> Uphold the mana of the participants</p> | <p>Credibility Confirmability Transferability Authenticity</p> | <p>Held each person in genuine positive regard; situated myself as a learner benefiting from our time together (Rallis et al., 2007).</p> <p>Maintained “emphasis (is) on preserving the integrity of a particular event, individual, or group of individuals” (Moriarty, 2011, p. 21) by ensuring anonymity, refraining from marking coursework, and reflecting back to each person the specific ways they were shaping the research to affirm their unique contribution.</p> |
| <p><i>Kaua e mahaki</i> Share knowledge without flaunting knowledge</p> | <p>Credibility Dependability Confirmability Transferability Authenticity</p> | <p>Used an approach which allowed for “a multivoiced construction of meaning, in a manner that promoted self-determination by the research participants through a process of power sharing” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p. 169).</p> <p>Suggested questions and agendas finalised by the group.</p> <p>Verified findings with five new participants in 2015; ensured the results fitted with their experiences (Cope, 2014)</p> <p>In the final interviews and final focus group in 2015, the conceptual framework for the thesis was refined and verified by the group in a three-hour exercise that also shared the collective knowledge to each individual in the group.</p> |

Analysis of interview and focus group data

Complex issues require new and diverse ways of seeing in order to identify solutions that represent the most people and are likely to fit the most people. To expand our diversity of thought, Bolstad et al. (2012) suggest exploring the spaces between people, and what happens there, rather than focusing on the individual people or ideas. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory provides an effective framework for exploring the relationships between individuals and the layers of their ecology (1979, 1986) as shown in Figure 7.

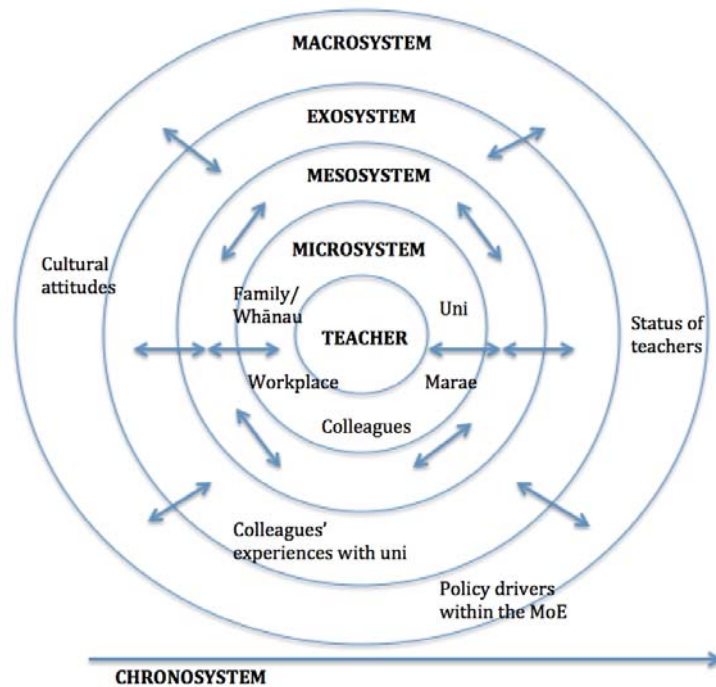


Figure 7. Example of a teachers’ ecology
(Adapted from “The Ecology of Human Development”, Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Consider a teacher engaged in postgraduate study as a way to illustrate the model: s/he sits at the centre of the ecology, reciprocally influencing each layer of the environment to varying degrees. Most directly, s/he is shaped by, and shapes, each of the *microsystems* (e.g. family/whānau, workplace, university, marae, colleagues). The

mesosystem, one layer out, reflects the interconnections of microsystems, for instance the interaction between colleagues and the workplace, or family/whānau's attitudes toward university. The *exosystem* impacts the individual, but less directly; this might include colleagues' experiences with the university, which impact the overall workplace climate but are less within the control of the individual teacher. The *macrosystem* depicts the culture in which an individual lives, encompassing the values and beliefs, practices and policies. For a teacher, this might entail the status of teachers, the government's support of education, and current policy drivers within the Ministry of Education. Lastly, the *chronosystem* reflects changes over time. These can be at the individual level, for instance divorcing or losing a job, or at the societal level, such as women's status in the workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

The first iteration of Bronfenbrenner's framework was published in 1979; however, the theory was always a work in development, continually refined and revised throughout his career. Early understandings of the framework, even by Bronfenbrenner himself, under-emphasised the agency of the individual at the centre of his or her context (1986). Bronfenbrenner self-corrected this emphasis in later iterations, foregrounding the mutually constitutive nature, or *proximal processes*, between person and context (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). Later iterations of the framework informed my process, my group selection and also my unit of analysis.

In Bronfenbrenner's Process, Person, Context and Time (PPCT) model, *process* connotes the reciprocal interactions between the *person* and the layers of their environment, and *context* represents the layers of the ecology. *Time* was originally about the chronosystem, or the period in time in which the ecosystem operated (1986). Later, Bronfenbrenner further divided time into micro-time, meso-time and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Micro-time is what happens in individual moments of interaction between people and their ecosystems, such as a specialist teacher collaborating with a parent. Meso-time takes a cumulative look at similar interactions over time, for instance specialist teachers' work alongside parents over the course of their career. The chronosystem situates interactions in a period of time, such as specialist teacher-parent engagement in the 2014/2015 inclusive education context in Aotearoa New Zealand (Tudge et al., 2009).

Later versions of Bronfenbrenner's framework fit best with this research, as I wanted to analyse the space where knowledge was constructed through the key messages identified across interviews and focus groups. A total of thirty-four individual interviews and two formal focus groups were conducted. Each individual interview was then independently transcribed by a transcriber who had signed the *Transcriber confidentiality agreement*.

I then conducted a recursive thematic analysis using the stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation; generating the initial codes; identifying and refining themes; defining themes, and articulating these findings. As these authors suggest, the process began during data collection, as I began "to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data" (p. 15). My analysis spanned the entire project, as it involved "a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts, ... the analysis of the data" and viewed "writing [as] an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end" (p. 15).

I began by listening to the audio of each interview several times while editing the transcripts, filling in words that were unintelligible to the transcriber and noting long pauses or body language from my interview notes. After engaging with each transcript one or more times, I used an inductive process to identify and refine the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) summarise the purpose of thematic analysis as looking across data sets "to find repeated patterns of meaning" (p. 16). I did this first in the margins of hard copies of each interview, and again with different highlighters colour-coded to each of the themes on those same hard copies. This process allowed for expansive coding, as I could record my thoughts and my reactions to the discussion, and make linkages between their words and other sources of evidence (for instance, something said in supervision or a podcast I had listened to recently).

After several iterations of informal coding, I then systematically coded the interviews using NVivo. This iteration was more of a refinement exercise; having a deep feel for the interview, and having documented my broader thoughts around the session, I was well prepared for this next layer of coding.

Using NVivo enhanced the rigour of the thematic analysis. Essentially, I could not code data selectively to fit my pre-determined ideas. Coding to the point of saturation, where each section of text fell under one of the themes, ensured that I had canvassed all of the material, including that which was disconfirming, and prohibited me from sticking with a few preferred codes. The disconfirming evidence, themes identified in one or more interviews that went against ideas shared in other interviews, was useful in creating a conceptual framework most likely to be credible and transferable.

My computer crashed early in 2015 and all of the 2014 coding was lost. This was ultimately fortuitous, as recoding the data set further down the track allowed me to hone my codes yet again, from a distanced and further developed perspective. In this second iteration of NVivo coding, I used a two-phased approach suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, in Flores & Day, 2006): transcripts were analysed vertically (exploring one participant's interviews over time) as well as horizontally (considering the data set from one point in time).

Initial themes were shared with my supervisors to check for clarity and bias. Additionally, one of my supervisors read through two transcripts (Sam and Friend) to confirm the dependability of the themes I had identified (Cope, 2014). These were the themes shared with the participants before and on the day of the 2014 focus whānau group.

I transcribed the focus group sessions myself as I was familiar with the different voices. Additionally, these data reflected the co-construction so central to my study; I found, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested, I “develop(ed) a far more thorough understanding of [my] data through having transcribed it” (p. 18). Because the focus groups explored emerging themes, I used a deductive analysis to explore the trustworthiness of the initial themes in relation to participants responses to the initial findings. At the end of 2014, focus group data were used to refine the research questions for the following year; at the end of 2015, focus group data were used to revise the conceptual framework of *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*.

As Josselson so eloquently puts it:

We work with what is said and what is not said, within the context in which life is lived and the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life. We then must decode, reorganise, recontextualise, or abstract that life in the interest of reaching a new interpretation of the raw data of experience before us. (2011, p. 33)

Constructing the themes foregrounded the tensions between what Josselson (2011) terms the *authority of experience* and the *authority of expertise*. Honouring the authority of experience requires the privileging of participants' stories in ways that feel authentic to each participant – where they can see themselves in the final document and this portrayal feels true to each of them. Sometimes in contrast, foregrounding the authority of expertise involves viewing the themes in ways that serve the slightly different purpose of contributing to the scholarly debate. In doing so, however, stories are sometimes interpreted in ways that serve the researcher and the higher-level thinking around the topic, but risk feeling less 'real' from the participants' perspectives.

I grappled with this tension for some time, torn between authenticity in my representation of people's experiences and insights, and urge to step back from individual stories to draw out themes in line with the research questions and overall aims of the study. A conversation with a mentor was useful; Kelchtermans (personal communication, 2015) noted that 'a fish cannot analyse the water'. His work with Ballet (2002) further illustrated the power of pulling themes from an intensive look at one person's story across the layers of their professional environment. This guidance helped me to find the balance between honouring the authority of each participant and utilising my own unique position as the person who knew every story, albeit from one step removed.

Another consideration, which shaped my process, was the ethics of representing the fuller detail of people's stories. In a programme that could be identified by my study, in a small country, sharing stories in full might lead to the identification of participants. Drawing themes across stories made the themes the unit of analysis, rather than the

participant. This was true to the methodology of narrative inquiry, balanced the authorities, and protected the anonymity of the participants.

Researcher's diary

As mentioned in the introduction, I did not intend to become so personally involved in the study as I became. I did not elevate my ongoing reflection as an important source of data, or see my contributions to the interviews of equal importance to those of my participants. I also underestimated the extent to which I would be changed by the research process, and the importance of documenting this. By becoming one of the group, seeking meaning personally and professionally just as I asked them to, my study and my own experience were strengthened.

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that writing is central to analysis, not something done at the end. "Writing should begin in phase one, with the jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes, and continue right through the entire coding/analysis process" (p. 86). I kept a researcher's diary for the three years I engaged in this study, including the time before and after my data collection with participants. This platform allowed me a space to record tensions I was experiencing in my own teaching and learning, insights gleaned from less formal sources (such as TED talks and conversations with colleagues) and thoughts not yet well formed enough to include in my thesis. Sharing these wonderings and dilemmas with my participants added authenticity and vulnerability to the interviews, and modelled reciprocity within our time together.

I also considered myself, the researcher, within the story, both in the interactions over time with the participants, and how our relationships influenced the stories they told. This was in part to reduce the power dynamic within the research process, "to create a more equitable relationship between the researcher and those she or he studies by subjecting the researched and the researcher to an analytic lens" (Chase, 2011, p. 59). But the journal also allowed me to note changes in myself along the way – my journey paralleled the students' journey. I too was a student grappling with the big questions of work-life integration and a new professional identity – it was important to me to

“explore the research questions more fully by including the researcher’s experience of it” (Chase, 2011, p. 59).

I could also respond to as many of the Bevan-Brown’s Rs as possible. Specifically, by ensuring the research was “important, relevant, empowering, and beneficial” (Bevan-Brown, 2001, p. 142) for participants (right questions); working with a small enough group in a central location so that everything could be done face-to-face (right way) and in the locations preferred by participants (right place and time). Asking the right questions in the right ways was especially important to me, and so I worked with participants to get the questions right before and as they were answering them. This was particularly useful in co-constructing the second phase of interviews and developing a framework most likely to be useful to participants.

Conclusion

This chapter summarised the research methodology and methods, including the context of the research and selection of participants, ethical considerations and matters of trustworthiness. The research methods of interview, focus group and research diary were overviewed; choices were summarised and justified in relation to the literature on narrative inquiry, positive psychology and biculturally responsive approaches to research in Aotearoa New Zealand. The strength of the methods was their fit with biculturally responsive research; the match with the research questions, and the cyclical and participatory analysis whereby emerging themes were shared with participants in an iterative and genuinely collaboratively way.

Chapter 4 – Findings: Professional Identity, Authentic Practice and Wellbeing

Introduction to the findings

This research was originally undertaken to answer four questions around professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing. The first question examines participants' ideas in relation to professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing; the second question clarifies the intersections of these constructs, from the perspective of participants. Question three unpacks the enablers, barriers and tensions, participants encounter in their practice. Question four is arguably the most important question, as how participants position themselves within and against personal and professional tensions critically informs the conceptual framework that is the original contribution of this thesis.

Early in the research process, it became apparent that participants saw *professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing* as connected rather than separate. Hence, the findings are more focused on the connections *across* constructs. Additionally, reflecting on initial interview and focus group data, as well as the literature, the participants and I started to question the accuracy of these initial terms and associated understandings.

In 2015, the research questions were refined to reflect new understandings, and to incorporate language that better captured these interpretations. Specifically, 2015 interviews retained the original questions, with the addition of questions around new constructs of *fulfilment, stance, stamina and supports*. Retaining the initial constructs, I was able to explore changes in participants' thinking over time. Adding new constructs, I was able to co-construct the conceptual framework for practice that was being developed in the second year.

To best represent the data, the findings are presented in two discrete chapters. Chapter 4 presents the interview data from 2014 and the beginning of 2015, as these interviews were focused most closely on the original research questions. The constructs of *professional identity*, *authentic practice* and *wellbeing* are briefly summarised, followed by a detailed exploration of the connections between the concepts, structured according to the themes identified from the data.

Chapter 5 answers the final research questions, examining the enablers and barriers participants have encountered in developing their professional identities, authentic practice and wellbeing and how they navigated the tensions. Many of their strategies drew on their *stance*, *stamina* and *supports*; thus these findings are presented together and alongside the literature and theory. Data from the interviews conducted at the end of 2015 and the final focus whānau group meeting are foregrounded in order to explicate the conceptual framework developed in the second iteration of the study.

As noted in the Methodology chapter, this research was cyclical in nature, co-constructed alongside participants in cycles of data collection and analysis. In navigating the difficulty of describing evolving, recursive findings in the more linear style required by a thesis, I have signposted aspects of the findings that are introduced in this chapter but revisited, stretched and deepened in subsequent chapters.

Q1 – How do participants make sense of the constructs of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing?

As shown in Table 9, this section provides a high-level summary of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing in order to establish shared understandings before revisiting the concepts in depth. More detailed and integrated findings are shared thematically, and substantiated more extensively with participants' perspectives, in answer to the second research question.

Table 9. Findings for Questions 1 and 2

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Q1: How do participants make sense of the concepts of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing?</p> | <p>Professional identity Authentic practice Wellbeing</p> | |
| <p>Q2: What do participants see as the connections between these ideas?</p> | <p>Know thyself</p> | <p>Know who they are (personal characteristics) Know the difference they want to make (mission and contribution) Know what they believe to be true, and that this would only ever be true for them Know their own needs, especially in terms of their wellbeing</p> |
| | <p>Practice as relational</p> | <p>Authentic practice as valuable only to the extent it lifts others</p> |
| | <p>Practice as ecological and contextualized</p> | <p>Practice as collective: Drawing on collective wisdom</p> |
| | <p>Practice as challenging</p> | <p>Learning from the most difficult</p> |
| | <p>Practice as lifelong learning</p> | <p>Rejecting the expert model Shifting to ‘facilitator’, ‘connector’</p> |

Professional identity

For participants in the present study, professional identity centrally involved knowing oneself, knowing the profession and knowing one’s context. Participants quickly and easily articulated the ways they would want children, families/whānau and teachers to describe them. These descriptions invariably included personal characteristics, such as good listening skills and compassion, and an assertion that “those humanistic aspects are more important to me than for them to sit and think that I have got so much knowledge that I can come and help them with” (Kirsten, Pre-2015).

In addition to these ways of seeing themselves, and hoping they were seen by others, participants consistently foregrounded their sense of themselves as lifelong learners. They perceived ongoing learning and reflection as stretching them professionally, fuelling their curiosity and creativity, and ensuring their long-term relevance in the field.

Through their ongoing and intentional growth as professionals, participants honed their overall mission and the unique contribution they might make to the profession. As they refined their individual and collective identities as specialist teachers, participants increasingly rejected the expert model they saw as permeating the education context. They challenged commonly held understandings of their role as having all of the answers, or being equipped to single-handedly solve the problems of others. Shifting away from an ultimate goal of becoming an expert, they also questioned linear, individualistic pathways from novice to expert. In contrast, participants honoured an integrated and collaborative craft knowledge whereby they could increasingly draw out and integrate the three circles of evidence as conceptualised by Bourke et al., (2005). Their professional identities were as evidence-based professionals, working at the intersection of three circles of evidence: the research evidence, one's professional wisdom, and the voices of the children, young people and families/whānau with whom they worked. They sought to co-construct unique solutions for complex situations in alliance with everyone involved. In this regard, they came to see themselves as 'facilitators' and 'connectors' rather than experts.

Conceptualising evidence-based practice as the intersection of three circles of evidence is a framework less widely known outside of Specialist Teaching and the Aotearoa New Zealand education sector. Each participant was first introduced to this framework during the postgraduate study, and reported similar paths to engaging with and integrating this approach. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6, this group of specialist teachers initially privileged the research evidence, assuming the presence and validity of best practices and viewing the practitioner's role as identifying and enacting 'best practice' in any given situation. Increasingly, through the postgraduate study, they gained an appreciation for the third circle of evidence: the perspective of

the children, family/whānau and other teachers involved. They incorporated the third circle of evidence by actively and authentically involving others in the assessment of situations and the co-construction of ways forward.

It often took the longest to acknowledging the second circle – their own wisdom and lived experience – as part of their professional identity. Dominant discourses can be disparaging of teachers working without an externally-validated evidence base, and this might explain why these teachers discounted the gift of their own experience. In a follow up conversation a year later, Sam (2016) argued the universities also discount this circle when they require a person to have an undergraduate degree to do postgraduate study, irrespective of life experience.

As their self-understandings grew, participants created roles that better aligned with their beliefs, values and practices. They considered themselves to be change agents, crafting their jobs and their contexts to maximise their bespoke contributions in each microsystem. They acknowledged the mutually constitutive ways they were influenced by the education and special education contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand. Working in from the macrosystem, their practices were shaped by their local practice contexts (exosystem) and by the child/system they were supporting (microsystem). Each piece of fieldwork looked different as they integrated three circles of evidence unique to that situation. Participants saw their skills sets as broad and nimble; they could therefore join a new team and fill the need in that team. Adhering to the *process* of evidence-based practice, they were increasingly confident in their ability to impact the lives of children, families/whānau and systems. A fundamental aspect of their professional identity involved positioning themselves within the tensions of the role, identifying their priorities and their zones of influence and acting authentically in any given situation.

These ideas, particularly in relation to how participants crafted their roles and viewed the three circles of evidence as an alternative to the expert model, were explored more deeply as key components of *stance*. They will be revisited more fully in Chapter 6.

Authentic practice

For this group of participants, authentic practice was predicated on truth, trust and relationships. They replaced the construct of authenticity with the *genuineness* they brought to their interactions, and privileged this genuineness over expertise.

Participants viewed truth as subjective and dynamic, and worked to tap into their own truths as well as those of the people around them. Similarly, they strived to practise in ways that would feel true for everyone involved.

Participants viewed authenticity as situated in collaboration with others. Authentic practice was thus relational; their own practice felt authentic only to the extent that it lifted the authentic practice of others. Working in authentic ways required a good deal of vulnerability, as each participant worked to break down power relations and other barriers, and to co-construct ways forward that were unique to the given situation. Sam, for instance, enacted her vulnerability explicitly and transparently: at the outset of each new referral, she deconstructed her role as expert and grew shared understandings of her potential contribution. Sam emphasised that she could not know or do it all; that the group might never know the outcomes of their work together, and that it was essential to talk openly about mistakes and failures in order to determine best possible next steps. As a parent of a child with autism, she believed the biggest barrier to authentic practice was professionals' need to 'sell' their involvement, wanting to prove to others that they had made a difference. Sam perceived this as inauthentic, and needlessly putting up walls in the relationship. Working as a professional with that understanding, she always clarified her role as "genuinely grappling in the dark together" (post-2015) in order to get somewhere useful.

Trust was multi-faceted, and participants worked to trust their own lived experience, the voices of the other people on the team around the child, and the collaborative process. They also sought to be trustworthy, from the perspective of children and families/whānau, and from the perspective of management. Once this trust was established, they believed they could respond more effectively to the needs of the current situation.

Viewed in this way, authentic practice was comprised of the parallel dimensions of being true to oneself and bringing out the authenticity in others. Participants worked in ways that fitted with their own values and craft knowledge, with a focus on lifting the authenticity of others. This relational view of authentic practice moulded fieldwork in *process* as well as *product*. In *process*, participants worked to elicit and respond to the voice of each person at the table and to increasingly foreground the child and family as the key participants in their own situation. The benefits of this style of practice worked both ways; there were times participants saw something in themselves only once it had been highlighted by someone else. Mia, as one example, hadn't valued her own culturally responsive practices until a mentor 'held up a mirror' (Post-2015) to her unique skill set and created a role in cultural leadership for her.

In *product*, participants co-created unique interventions to build on the strengths of each team member, honour the culture of the family and the context, and further the achievement and wellbeing of the child. Working in these ways, they confronted tensions including policies prohibiting home visits and timelines limiting long-term involvement with casework. Each participant navigated these tensions differently. Some challenged policies and practices outright, whilst others quietly did the job they believed should be done alongside the job they were hired to do. In both cases, the ways they negotiated professional tensions impacted both on their ability to practise authentically and their wellbeing. These ideas fit best with *stamina* and *practising fiercely*, and are more fully explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Wellbeing

Participants joined this study primarily due to their long-time interest in wellbeing; as such, they had reflected considerably on the topic prior to joining the research. Hannah, for example, had a complex and nuanced understanding of wellbeing: "I think wellbeing is when you feel that your life is balanced, and you feel supported ... cared for. That you feel strong in your beliefs; that you give yourself time." For women in particular, she noted, "we're very good at putting everybody else first, and it's taken me a long time to work that one out, so I think that's important" (Hannah, Pre-2014). Lastly, she summarised the importance of "doing something that you want to do , that

interests you ... and you're doing it because it's what you want to do, not because it's what you've got to do" (Pre-2014).

During the initial interviews, participants frequently described wellbeing as akin to a state of balance. Their explanations of wellbeing invariably drew on Māori notions of *hauora* (wellbeing) and specifically Durie's (1985) Te Whare Tapa Wha framework with its focus on balancing physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and family wellbeing, as described by Katie:

Whenever I think of wellbeing, I do think of hauora. I think of that holistic viewpoint. ... My wellbeing is really intact when I know all my four walls are really strong, you know my family, body, mind and soul or *wairua*. That it is all really connected and on a firm foundation. (Katie, Pre-2015)

Their later examples of difficulties in their lives often fell into the four dimensions of Te Whare Tapa Wha as well. Participants discussed their struggles in caring for young children as well as aging parents, or being in the midst of divorce (*whānau*). They talked about difficulties with their own health or that of someone in their care (physical). They confessed to dips in self-efficacy (psychological and emotional) and struggling at times to make meaning of it all (spiritual).

In their pursuit of balance, participants viewed getting out of balance, and recognising this, as an important aspect of getting back into balance. They frequently noticed the tensions in their lives, in particular when the balance they created at work detracted from balance at home. For some participants, periods of disequilibrium motivated them to make changes. Hannah viewed imbalance as her own best teacher, and made small and large life choices guided by disequilibrium (Pre-2014). For other participants, their perceived inability to find balance deflated them. Sam frequently questioned what she viewed as her inability to make herself one of her priorities (Pre-2014, Post-2014).

For almost every participant, at some point in their lives, getting out of balance was more extreme. For some of these women, this occurred during the two years of the research. They shared significant mental and physical health issues and the ways these

had transformed their lives personally and professionally. As a result of difficult times, they often conceptualised wellbeing as being more about perspective than circumstance. Zena, for example, shared that her moment of greatest wellbeing came in the post-op room at the hospital, in pain and the after-effects of general anaesthesia, when the doctor confirmed that she did not have cancer (Post-2014).

Over two years of formal interviews and less formal discussions, it became apparent that the way participants constructed the idea of wellbeing supported or hindered their actual wellbeing. For those who conceptualised wellbeing in ways that proved elusive for them, measuring their current state against an idealised state was a source of frustration or dismay. For others, equating wellbeing predominantly with physical wellbeing could be equally frustrating. As with authentic practice and professional identity, wellbeing was also a relational construct. Zena was most frustrated that her health issues prevented her from giving back in the ways she had always been able to (Post-2014).

In conclusion, participants shared their own perspectives on the three overarching constructs of professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing. Each perspective was unique, and shifted over time; yet there were considerable overlaps in the ways participants storied their lives and their practices. Common to every participant was the notion that their identities, practices and wellbeing were co-constructed with others, situated in a time and place, fluid and relational.

Q2 – What do participants see as the connections between these ideas?

This section explores the connections participants made between identity, practice and wellbeing, including how practising authentically fed into their wellbeing and identity. The section also addresses the disconnections for participants around the three constructs, for example when they did not fit together seamlessly or had a paradoxical effect on one another.

From the first round of interviews, the inextricable connections between professional identity, authentic practice and wellbeing were apparent. The interview questions explored each construct separately; as we reached the second or third subsection of

the interview schedule, participants would often say “I think I’ve already answered that.” Increasingly, the three constructs began to feel like shades of the same fundamental notion.

Belinda described the connection between authentic practice, professional identity and wellbeing as flow. Describing a time in her life when she saw this connection most vividly, she shared, “Everything flowed quite easily because the relationships were there with the students and things were easy at home as far as how everything was managed and working. To me it’s flow; everything flowed nicely” (Belinda, Post-2014). Another participant, Friend, described her best, most well self as “cheerful and soft and focussed on others and knowing you’re making a contribution”. When asked how those times influenced her practice, she added “I am probably more confident and maybe there is more of an awareness of the other people, like of the parent and of the child and of the what’s happening.” For Ruth, overall wellbeing made her practice “more coordinated and organised ... [and] probably I’m more observant, too” (Pre-2014).

During the focus group discussion (2014), the group pulled the three ideas together more systematically. They considered wellbeing as the sense of being whole and well, that one takes out into the world, but also that which comes back when one is living and working in ways that really fit with who they are and their beliefs and values. For them, authentic practice flows out, wellbeing flows in, and all of that is embodied in one’s identity and practice (Focus Group, 2014). Friend later identified her way of seeing professional identity (*who I am*) and authentic practice (*what I do*) as two sides of the same coin. Additionally, for her, wellbeing should never be the aim, but rather the natural byproduct of a life well lived (Post-2014). In Chapter 7, these ideas will be pulled together as part of the discussion of *fulfilment*.

Considering the three constructs together, the group discussed the way difficulties in one area began to unravel the other two areas. When Friend was well, she described herself as “a bit ... softer ... not just being about ‘I have to do this’ and ‘Why haven’t you done that?’.” When her wellbeing started to slip, “I start feeling stressed and then

I start being grumpy. Generally I'll start turning little things into lectures and everything starts becoming a problem" (Pre-2014).

In the main, participants noted the positive correlation between the three constructs. Lola, however, shared a divergent perspective. She talked about the connections between authentic practice and wellbeing but also what she saw as the distinction. Lola believed that all of her work was authentic, but that not all of it will be tied to her wellbeing. For her, authentic practice was a constant in her work – 'being true to who I am and what I know' (Post-2014) – but she didn't get 'the same buzz' from all of her casework. In other words, whilst she consistently gave her best and was satisfied with the changes she brought about in kids, she shared that not all of her work 'fed her soul' (Post-2014).

As well as the disconnects between the three ideas, some participants mentioned the inverse relationship at times between the constructs. Friend noted that sometimes a temporary dip in one construct was needed to ultimately lift another one. As a parent who raised three children with a specific impairment, and then trained in that subsector of special education, Friend tended to position herself as a parent first who sneaked in the back door as a professional. Although she acknowledged that this was about confidence and her internal dialogue, rather than a message she'd received from others, it shaped her practice and identity significantly. She had a powerful moment of seeing herself on video and thinking she didn't want to be that person. "You see yourself and you see something in yourself that you don't like – you can change it. But if I hadn't seen that video, I wouldn't have known that, wouldn't have known that's what I looked like. I might've had an idea but not the harsh reality of it" (Post-2015). The short term toll on her wellbeing – "it was horrible, I bawled my eyes out" – led to longer term lifts in authentic practice and professional identity as she made changes to her practice.

The strength of Friend's professional identity was the intertwining with her personal journey: as a mother of three children with impairments, she became a professional who could relate to parents as a parent, and sought to give them hope. Thus, in most ways, her lived experience and authenticity were her greatest strengths; still, they

sometimes lessened her sense of professional identity as she compared herself with people with more traditional professional pathways. In these ways, dominant notions of expertise interfered with participants' identities. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, participants eschewed the notion of expert but were still influenced by it.

Know thyself

As shown in Table 9, the themes are: know thyself; practice as relational; practice as ecological and contextualised; practice as challenging, and practice as life-long learning. For participants, in relation to the first theme, professional identity encompassed knowing oneself, knowing the profession and knowing one's context. In terms of professional identity, participants identified the personal characteristics they saw as informing their identity and practice. These included personal dispositions, a sense of mission and a vision of the contribution they hoped to make. Authenticity in their practice was comprised of truth, trust in themselves and others, and trust in a way of working. Knowing themselves, in relation to wellbeing, involved understanding their personal needs, and the ways they were transformed by extreme challenges to their wellbeing.

Know who they are (personal characteristics)

Participants articulated the specific dispositions and strengths they brought to the role; the majority mentioned being compassionate, good listeners, strengths-based and solution-focused. Hannah's quote pulls together the 'soft skills' valued by participants:

I hope they would [say] that I listened to them. That I heard what they were saying they wanted for themselves and for the students. That I was supportive and ... could see the positive side of their children ... and that I cared. I think that's the biggest thing – that they [know you] care, that they know you're on their side ... because often by the time they come to us, they'll have been through various teachers and schools. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

Alongside descriptions of their softer personal characteristics, they often mentioned practices such as determination and persistence. As one example, Hannah (Pre-2014) discussed a student with whom she had worked for three years in spite of ongoing and significant hurdles. When asked how she made sense of the positive outcomes she and the student had achieved, Hannah noted the benefits of her own tenacity.

I wouldn't give in and I wouldn't go away! Just sheer dogged determinedness, I suppose. ... He'd had a lot of people who'd tried things with him, and he was very trying and very testing at times, but he eventually began to believe in my belief. (Pre-2014)

Zena's descriptions of herself also combined these hard and soft notions of professional practice. She noted that she'd like to be described as "someone who would hear them ... I wouldn't ignore their voice. So, I guess it's trust, at the end of the day". In the same sentence, she emphasised, "[I] won't give up on you. [I'll] always encourage you to do more than you can, do your best but just keep achieving as high as you can" (Zena, Pre-2014). What came to be called *practising fiercely*, pulling together the 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of discerning practice, will be more fully unpacked in Chapter 6.

Know the difference they want to make (mission and contribution)

Professional identities were fortified as participants learned more about themselves and their contexts. They increasingly clarified their strengths and interests, and consolidated their original mission with a growing appreciation for the unique contribution they hoped to make in the sector. Every participant noted this explicitly. For example, Daphne explained her career change to specialist teaching as "I wanted to use the expertise that I had; it was just a way of using the skills I had to fill that gap [in the current system]" (Daphne, Pre-2015).

For Sam, a parent of a child diagnosed with autism, the contribution that she hoped to make was particularly clear:

My theme this year became connection. That was my big word compared to the past year where I was looking at layer upon layers of what I knew

and who I was and unpacking that. This year it was much more 'okay, I think I know who I am; now what can I do with it to make it work?' ... I realised over and over and over it is the autistic voice [I was] wanting to hear. And help families to hear and help teachers to hear. To help them stop trying to turn these people into who we wish they were. (Post-2014)

Within her specialist service, Zena carved out a role for herself working with the older students with learning and behaviour difficulties. She saw this as her speciality, and a way to support the students, their parents who were less comfortable supporting secondary students. She described a meeting at the end of the year, where cases were allocated to everyone on the team:

He was brought up at our intake meetings ... it was the very last case and nobody wanted him. ... It would've been the end of the year. ... You read the cases out and you hear about the backgrounds and it was all negative about this boy. ... I thought, I can't leave him with nobody. I can't go on a holiday, have a break and he's got no one. To me, that's just not right, especially at high school age because I think those are one of the toughest times for them. They can get severely lost Year 9, 10. If you don't catch them, you've lost them. ... [And] I just know how hard it is as a parent. When things don't go well for them at school, it's not easy. (Pre-2014)

Having a strong sense of mission came with tensions as well. For example, Kirsten viewed working directly with children as the best part of her job. However, she wanted to have a broader impact through systems-level work with teachers and schools. For Kirsten and others, then, there was a disconnection between how they could make the biggest difference and the role they most enjoyed.

It is really important to me to feel that what I am doing is actually making a difference. The biggest downside to my job [as a specialist teacher] is I love working with kids, and I miss it so much because I don't get that interaction with them. But actually knowing that I am there on the sidelines doing something that is going to ultimately benefit them is what keeps me going, I love that. (Pre-2015)

Know what they believe to be true, and that this is only ever true for them

At its essence, participants saw authentic practice as involving truth. Bella defined authentic practice as “being true to yourself, standing up for what you know is right” (Pre-2014). When asked what she would do, if her supervisor asked her to refrain from doing something she believed in, she responded, “I think I would still have gone ahead with it. Might have some arguments because you think it’s true and what’s right. Just going by your conscience” (Pre-2014).

Whilst they saw policies as attempting to streamline and standardise their practice, this group of specialist teachers considered it equally important to practise in personalised ways that were consistent with their knowledge, skills, ethics and values (Focus Group, 2014). Hannah, like others, did not see the purpose or utility in practising any other way:

I think to be authentic you have to truly believe in it and I think if you don’t, no matter how convincing you try to be, people can see through that and kids clearer than adults at times. I think you have to believe in what you’re doing. (Pre-2014)

Alongside practices that felt true for them personally, participants aspired to practises that would feel true for everyone involved. They consistently emphasised practising in ways they would appreciate if they were the child, the parent or the teacher. For Belinda, being true to the students and their parents meant treating her students as she would want to be treated, or would want her own children to be treated. When describing the thinking behind the lessons she creates for students, she said:

I know myself as a learner: if I can relate to what I’m hearing, I understand and enjoy it more. So I suppose I try to do it that way as well. ... I used to hate maths at school when I was a kid. I just hated it. ... But I’ve ended up teaching some maths at secondary school and I teach it the way I wish I’d been taught. You can see a light kind of switch on in kids’ heads. ... They actually understand because I didn’t understand. So I’ve tried to teach them the way that not only do I understand but they understand it, too. (Pre-2014)

Often this truth came from personal experiences that led each of these participants into the field of inclusive education. Lola explored this idea, explaining why she shifted from classroom teaching to becoming a specialist teacher:

I went teaching, loved it, but realised there were kids that were falling behind and I really empathised with them because when I was younger I had a head injury – when I was 14 I fractured my skull and ended up bruising my brain. I found school, for a year, really difficult. I couldn't concentrate, I had major problems, so I always felt really sorry for those kids who were struggling and were busting their butts and just couldn't make it. So, when I saw a job for [a specialist teacher] pop up I thought, why not go for it and I did and now I'm doing [the specialist teaching role] and studying and loving it. (Pre-2014)

As one should never presume another's perspective, the group noted the importance of not imposing their own perceptions and experiences onto others. As a parent of a child with autism, now working in the same specialist area, Sam was keenly aware of this:

They don't need you to be their friend; they don't want to know about your experience. I didn't really want to hear someone else's story of how hard they had it. Even them saying, 'I know where you are at' – you are thinking, 'No, you don't'. I try really hard not to do that too much. I interviewed the parent of my practicum student and I was horrified, when I played the interview back, how often I had actually referenced [my own child]. That was too much, and so I think actually stepping back from [your experience, your truth] is important. (Post-2015)

As participants spoke of their truth, they were quick to note their own subjectivity. Like Sam, participants acknowledged that their truth was theirs and could not be imposed onto others. This fits well with the three circles of evidence, where professional wisdom is but one circle and the voice/truth of clients is another circle. Working at the intersection of the three circles was a critical aspect of participants' stance, and will be fleshed out in Chapter 7.

Know their own needs, especially in terms of their wellbeing

Know thyself also required a strong awareness of wellbeing including how they conceptualised wellbeing and how they supported their own wellbeing. Participants most often talked about wellbeing as a state of balance. When asked to consider the concept of wellbeing, the participants often focused on equanimity and “learning to go with that ebb and flow” (Hannah, Post-2014).

Maintaining equilibrium. I am not good at the highs and the lows, but I am great when everything is just coasting along. Sometimes my husband describes me as a bit of a micromanager and I have learnt not to micromanage this year, I have learnt to kind of go ‘Okay, you will take care of that and I don’t even need to mention that’. ... You kind of learn ... it is how you react to a situation that can make it better or worse. ... It is interesting isn’t it that when you stop trying to take control of everything, stuff just keeps going. Actually you didn’t need me to do that because somebody else just picked that up instead. (Belinda, Post-2014)

Several participants described a sense of everything fitting together. Lola pulled it together most succinctly as, “At that point in time, there was nowhere else I would rather have been ... everything was in its place and there wasn’t anything that I could’ve done differently to have been any happier at that point in time” (Lola, Pre-2014).

As mentioned earlier, participants frequently referenced Durie’s (1985) Te Whare Tapa Wha framework and sought to balance their physical, psychological, spiritual and family wellbeing. For some (Zena, Post-2014; Lola, Pre-2014) it was the physical aspect they saw as most critical: the first aspect of their lives that got out of balance and their first strategy for getting back into balance. For others (Kirsten, Pre-2014; Bella, Pre-2014) it was the emotional dimension. After a particularly difficult phase in her life, Hannah (Post-2014) noted the interconnectedness of Durie’s four elements and the hierarchy often revealed by crises:

It is a balance in the way that all the parts of your life are harmonious; you haven’t got one part that is completely out of kilter. Or, if you have got one

part that is starting to need a lot of your time and a lot of your energy, the rest of them are ticking along quite nicely. Harmonious. What I realised with my wellbeing when [my husband] was sick was suddenly I had got the most important part [out of balance] and the study and the work and everything, suddenly that harmony just totally didn't work anymore. So I think it is that idea that you can cope with a lot of things in your life if your core stability and the most important things in your life are stable, safe, and you can go back to those always. (Hannah, Post-2014)

Sam echoed this notion, and how important it is for most everything to be going well in order to handle the few things that aren't working smoothly.

I think wellbeing is when you feel whole, when you feel the parts of your life are working together or fitting together and there is balance. I think it is when things feel out of balance that it becomes like a domino effect. You can have gaps and you can have things missing and still feel whole if the things that you've got are working together well. (Sam, Pre-2014)

As a tangible example of this idea, Lola worked hard to regain her wellbeing after relocating to a large urban area. She operationalised Te Whare Tapa Wha to systematically address her social, spiritual, psychological, physical and family needs, walking after school with a new colleague to exercise and socialise.

You know how Māori perceive *hauora* (wellbeing): so you've got your spiritual, your physical, your emotional. Of course [in the schools] we had to teach that but I hadn't really ever thought about those connections before. I just went along with life and lived life. But after things hit the wall for me last year, which wasn't very great, I purposely examined each one of those and thought, 'What can I do to get myself well?' Because, obviously, I mentally wasn't very well. I looked at the level of exercise that I was doing and I looked at my physical activity, my emotional stuff – 'What am I doing?' I knew I didn't have a lot of friends up here but I still needed to have social stuff, so, 'What am I gonna do for social?' ... I've purposely tried to put things into each of those four categories, which really would

help for me and hopefully I would feel well and happy again, just like I did back then and I am starting to get there now. (Lola, Pre-2014)

At the time of the interview, she noted that she was “still not 100% well but I’m on my way to being well and I’m more aware of what wellness is and the connections between the different aspects in my life” (Lola, Pre-2014).

Practice as relational (authentic practice as valuable only to the extent it lifts others)

For these participants, authentic practice had individual components as well as collective, relational components. As explored earlier, the individual component consisted of practising in ways that fitted with one’s values and beliefs, skills and knowledge. Additionally, participants saw authentic practice as relational in process as well as product. In *process*, knowledge, skills and ways forward were co-constructed with the learners and the teams around them. Sam described her approach to teaching as

Where my personal approach and style close the gap between the students so that we are co-creating, working together on something. So it’s actually more of a symbiotic relationship than standing at the top in a didactic style, so I think it is authentic when the learning is happening together. (Pre-2014)

In *product*, they saw authenticity as enabling the authenticity of others to shine through. When asked to identify examples of authentic practice, every participant described changes in others as a result of their involvement rather than naming their own part in the process. Ruth, for example, alluded to the process and product but with an emphasis on the learner’s gains as part of her own professional fulfilment.

When I say, ‘everything aligns’ I mean the theory, the practice. It’s not about reaching a milestone or reaching a goal but you see that the learner has that sense of achievement as well and then their family also become aware so that it builds that sense of wellbeing and positive

accomplishment. They're usually really tiny [gains], we're not talking about big stuff. It's often the smallest stuff and it creates a joy. (Ruth, Post-2014)

Their focus was twofold, working in ways that felt authentic for them as individuals, but also that brought out the authenticity in others. Authentic practice was situated in the spaces they created together with children and young people, families/whānau and whānau, et al. (Focus Group, 2014). This conception of authentic practice balances the best of what a professional brings to a situation – their own structurally sound practice – with an explicit focus on lifting the input and outcomes of everyone involved. As discussed later, these two components do not always work in harmony and tensions can arise when much of one's sense of professional fulfilment comes from outcomes often outside one's control. Friend (Pre-2015), for example, described not being able to work in the ways she believed in, often due to what she perceived as resistance from families/whānau, and the stress this caused her. These ideas will be further interrogated as part of *stamina* in Chapter 6.

Mia (Post-2014) foregrounded the reciprocity involved in relational practice: as professionals enabled the best in others, others did the same for them. New to her current workplace, and just one year into her new role, Mia described herself as 'finding her feet'. Although she believed strongly in culturally responsive practice, and was Māori herself, she hadn't envisaged herself in a cultural support role. A peer mentor recommended her as a support to a non-Māori colleague who was struggling to connect with a family. Mia said it wasn't until someone else held up a mirror to her potential that she realised how she might create that role for herself.

My peer mentor saw me in that role, bringing the whānau together for the child in that triangle and being a mediator because I spoke ... the same culture. ... My peer mentor saw my role as a very authentic, cultural person, coming in and connecting with whānau. That it was more important to help the child and build the relationship with the mother before talking about the child. That was authentic. I had tears in my eyes when I got home because I thought, my gosh, she values me inside for who I am and what I bring to the table.

... She saw the value in that and saw my role. It changed the way I saw myself. I saw myself in a different mirror. I never saw myself as that person until she asked me. ... I think that's authentic practice. Even though I'm not officially in that role, to her, and the team, I am. ...

She opened the door and said, "This is you." ... She realised I had the potential to do it and the confidence. I said to her, "I can't be that person you ask me to be." ... She said, "Actually, you can." ... She really did open the door for me and she realised my potential. ... Probably, I knew deep down inside but I needed someone to unlock that potential. If I'm told I'm something, I will be it. If I'm not told or praised, it will not work, I will just put my head down and do what I need to do, just to tick the box.

Later, Mia (Post-2014) talked about the difference her peer mentor made in her own practice, and the ways Mia then fed this back into her office culture. The language she used further evidenced the extent to which practising authentically strengthened her professional identity.

She was very pleased for me to take on that role. She is part of my blossoming and my growth. ... She has embraced me but let me grow out and around everybody and surround everybody in my team, with my *aroha* (love) because she knows I'm very much that. I have a lot of *aroha* for everybody and she knows that. ...

[Talking about a specific change she's created in the office] It's bringing out their identities and their authentic practice, too, because I'm so open and they know who I am and they're bringing in their authentic practice. They're all meshing in with me and I feel that they're also opening up to me and discussing things with me quite openly. They know I'm very confidential in anything that I do. They're all just opening up and having great conversations with me. Their practice is coming out, too. ... It's so amazing for me to see their growth, too.

Because they viewed wellbeing in such relational ways, participants frequently discussed feeling most well when their people were well.

I am not sure if I am typical of a mother or parent, but wellbeing for me is that I am not really central to that wellbeing. If my children are happy, if my husband is happy. ... Particularly my children: if my children are happy and fulfilled and they have everything they need – and I don't mean in terms of monetary things, I mean in terms of emotional wellbeing – I'm happy. I can take all my study in stride, everything I have got on, because it is not important to me as their wellbeing. So for me that comes before anything else. My own wellbeing relies totally on them. And then once I know they are happy, my wellbeing is finding a balance and making sure that I am not overloaded. Making sure that I find time with my husband, that I can actually have conversations with my husband and my family every day and talk about what's important to us (Kirsten, Pre-2015).

As with participants' measures of authentic practice, focusing on the wellbeing of others as a measure of their own wellbeing brought some tensions. Belinda, Sam and Katie, for example, shared that they are often the last on their own priority lists. *Practising fiercely*, a phrase I developed to reflect participants' positioning, brings one's wellbeing back within their locus of control. These ideas are unpacked in Chapter 7.

Practice as ecological and contextualised

Who we are is shaped by the places we work (including policies and physical structures) and our communities of practice. Participants described the contextual influences on their practice, zooming in from the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand (macrosystem), to the education context (exosystem), to their specific workplaces and communities (microsystems). These ideas are introduced here, and revisited in more detail in Chapter 7.

This group aspires for Aotearoa New Zealand to be a bicultural nation. As such, teachers work within a bicultural context, and both Māori and non-Māori participants

considered culturally responsive practices as central to their authenticity. As such, key concepts from Te Ao Māori were embedded in their practice. The group valued the Māori notion of *ako* where every person is seen as both the learner and the teacher and every interaction is a simultaneous moment of learning and teaching (Focus Group, 2014). The group also endorsed Māori views of connectedness, where the child must always be seen within the wider context, inextricable from the family unit (Focus Group, 2015).

Mia framed every individual as being nested within systems: the child is nested within his family and school, and Mia herself is nested within her school-based and office ecologies. Within these contexts, Mia considered the people at every layer and worked to increase *ako* between participants.

I think authentic practice is being visible in school and not saying you are coming and you don't. ... Authentic practice is also seeking advice and guidance from others who are more experienced. I had a really tricky case where the parents were separated. ... What the [Special Needs Coordinator] said in her evaluation was that I sought advice from the whole team and talked to the team about it. How I could approach the case from the child's perspective and not just include the parents' issues in there, but focus on the child and their needs [too].

Authentic practice is gathering support from your team and asking people who have strengths what they think and how they go about solving issues or challenges within cases. Because they quite possibly have come across cases like this before. Also, it is learning from my mistakes: if I make a mistake, if something goes wrong it's actually okay. It is like looking out and going 'Oh gosh, why did that go wrong?' Reflect on it. So I will reflect on it for the week, write my little reflection and then I will go to my team leader and go, 'Oh my gosh, what do I need to do now?' Solving problems together is better than me trying to find out myself.

... I will give to others too. They will say to me, 'Oh, can you help me with this?' I go, 'Of course I can', and then I will say, 'Can you help me with this?'

So it goes back the other way. It's ako, ... teaching and learning. It is reciprocal as well. (Mia, 2014)

Within a bicultural context, participants worked across a range of settings, from early childhood to secondary, in more and less inclusive settings, and in management as well as practice. They worked directly with a range of children and young people, as well as with the family, schools/centres and communities around these learners. As such, they were firmly located within an educational context that did not always value children with diverse learning needs. In all of these spaces, they saw their role as challenging dominant paradigms that served as barriers for children with diverse learning needs, their families/whānau, schools and communities (Focus Group, 2014).

Working with young people nearing the end of their formal education, in a secondary setting, Belinda worked to counteract the negative messages her students had received along the way. When asked what inspires her as a teacher:

Especially in [secondary], the kids' success. The kids often come in a bit downtrodden because they've spent years and years and years being told that they can't do things and to be able to actually give them the opportunity to give things a go and have some [success] because we create opportunities for them to be successful. (Post-2014)

In many of the interviews, participants expressed a similar passion for supporting diverse learners to re-story themselves, to resist what participants saw as negative dominant views of their value. After she had shared several examples of authentic practice I asked Hannah to identify what it was about her that shines through in the examples she'd chosen. She focused on her ability to get kids to see themselves the way she saw them, or what she referred to earlier as 'believ[ing] in her belief'. (Hannah, 2014)

Zooming in from the macrosystem, participants noted the situated nature of their practice and the significant influence this had on their ways of working. Belinda shared examples of contextual influences on her authentic practice. Working in one setting constrained her practice, shaping her practice in ways that didn't sit comfortably for

her. In the next setting, the context lifted her personally as well as professionally. Contrasting the two roles, she said:

[Because the [new] school was a restorative practice school, they taught me how ... I think sometimes primary's quite punitive, certain types of schools can be quite punitive in the way that they punish kids, and I always was the enforcer. The principal would load the bullets, but I always got to fire them, and it became quite a burden, I suppose, to have to be like that. It's like being Dad, really, isn't it. Whereas when I moved schools, what I found was that because the process of discipline was about being restorative and making sure the relationships weren't damaged at all, I completely changed how I dealt with people. I can tell you, in seven years, I've never raised my voice, and the kids will often say, "Miss, you never get angry," I'm like, "What's the point? Nothing's gonna get achieved." I'm much calmer for being in that and I think it was the processes in the school that taught me to do that. And also, with teenagers, if you lose your rag, you're done for, basically. (Post-2014)

Each participant determined for herself the extent to which she could influence her context, whether she could live with the aspects of the culture she could not change, and ultimately whether to remain in the role. Like Belinda, Ruth eventually left a setting that stifled her authentic practice.

I've taught in places where the philosophy didn't fit, so, I wasn't practising authentically and I didn't stay, truthfully. If there was something I felt that I could do about that, then I did stay, but there were times when decisions were made by managers that I thought put the wellbeing of learners at risk and I tried to make some changes and couldn't, so, for my wellbeing, needed to shift somewhere else. (Ruth, Post-2014)

For Ruth and others, remaining in roles that were a bad fit jeopardised their wellbeing and posed ethical challenges professionally and psychologically (Focus Group, 2014).

With a deep appreciation of contextualised understandings, participants were committed to supporting children and young people holistically and ecologically. For Lola, she felt her practice was the most authentic when she returned to the small town in which she'd grown up. Understanding the context of her learners, because it had been her own learning environment as well, helped her to support them in the most authentic ways.

I like the idea of opening up the world and giving kids different perspectives to look at things from. Before I came to [large urban centre], I was living in a small rural town, and those kids don't have the same exposure to things as what city kids do. ... So just showing them different things and getting them to experience different things outside that little community, it's awesome. ... They realise that there is a world outside of that community. ... There are different avenues and you can leave this town and go to university and study and do anything that you wanna do. So they actually see that possibility – that's what keeps me going.

Growing up there I thought I'd pretty much live in that town forever, until I got near the end of high school and I was like actually I don't really want to work [in a job in town], what am I gonna do? I searched that out for myself, but not everyone does. ... I didn't see it as my job, but I definitely thought I can show them what I've seen since I've left. ... There are kids that hate living in that town, they really hate it and they don't know what else they can do ... so my drive is to show them what's out there. (Lola, Pre-2014)

Practice as collective: Drawing on collective wisdom

Whilst it draws on individual beliefs and value systems, authentic practice was not seen solely as an individual pursuit, with outcomes for the individual. Rather, it was a collective endeavour, where the group was more than the sum of its parts. As such, participants crafted their roles to draw on the wisdom of the child and the team around the child. Working in interprofessional teams, these professionals had the breadth and depth to analyse the existing strengths/needs of current team members and to nimbly maximise their own unique skill set for this particular team.

Zena's vision of authentic practice was "when everything that you have worked towards starts to pan out. When everybody is on board and thinking the same way; when you are all working towards the same goal." She was most aware of the authenticity at the end of the process, "when it starts to fit; when all the pieces start to fit in all together ... I have got people wanting to be part of it and ... they have actually made a piece of that puzzle fit." Zena was surprised to learn that not everyone views authentic practice as a collective endeavour. When asked to expand on her definition, she said, "Yeah, well it isn't about me is it? I'm just a tool. I'm part of the [specialist teaching service] to initiate others to pull out their tools and make something work" (Zena, 2014).

Lola also noted the importance of collective approaches to authenticity, with links to her wellbeing and happiness:

The term authentic to me means true, so to do what's right – but not just right in the sense of right and wrong, but that it brings in happiness. ... I could just go in and I could say, 'I think this kid needs this assessment and we'll find out what's wrong and this is a programme that's really good for the kid, let's do it.' In my mind, that's not authentic practice because it's not taking into account the whole child and the whole community that the child lives with. The parents are a huge part of the child's life and the child would actually have to want to do the programme. Everyone needs to have buy in, so just because I think this assessment's great, it might not actually be. There might be an aspect that I've missed from this child. I feel like I need to get everyone on board and then, as a team, we decide what is right and true for this child, what is the best thing for this child. That, to me, is authentic practice and includes everything about them. (Lola, Pre-2014)

Having such a collective sense of authentic practice shaped the way Lola storied herself within that practice:

I definitely see myself more as a facilitator now rather than bringing the expertise to the table. People call and say 'we have this problem, come in

and fix it'. I see myself ... utilising my resources to bring about that change, whether that is from my personal experience, whether that's from utilising colleague's expertise, whatever that is. ... One thing I learnt a lot this year was the student voice thing. ... I can't be the decision maker or firing out suggestions, I need to actually draw it out of other people as well. I guess that is how I see my role now: trying to draw out the information and the ideas from the stakeholders involved, and then from that as a team coming up with a decision. Where before it was more about, well obviously they have tried stuff from before and it hasn't worked so they will call in a [specialist teacher]. I will go in, I will see what I see, and then I will make suggestions and then we will come up with a decision. I didn't really think I was drawing stuff out of them as much as I could have. (Post-2014)

Participants in the present study strongly endorsed the collective nature of the work. Viewing their practice in this way inherently required lifelong learning, as no two interprofessional teams are ever the same. There are always different people at the table; there are always different tables. For them, authentic practice was about the ways practitioners draw on their own strengths in these moments, and also the ways they encourage others at the table to do the same.

Practice as challenging

Learning from the most difficult

When asked to share examples of authentic practice, participants consistently identified work that was challenging. In many cases, they spoke of practice on the border between competence and incompetence, work that felt too hard but with which they persisted. Out of their comfort zone, they stretched themselves, learned about themselves and saw their growth reflected in their own practice. The rewards of this type of work were varied, but always involved a combination of benefits for self and others, and always exemplified practising fiercely. The benefits of practising fiercely were seen most clearly in hindsight; irrespective of the success of a particular practice, participants were willing to embrace discomfort and the growth it could

bring. This is an important finding, as it might seem counterintuitive that doing more and harder is actually better for professional wellbeing and fulfilment.

Hannah (Pre-2014) spoke of a student she had in her classroom for three years “because nobody else would teach him, basically”. In her story, we see the long-term payoffs of persistence, both for her student and for Hannah’s sense of herself as an educator.

I just believed that there was something in this child that he could learn. He put up lots and lots of barriers. He didn’t want to, he found learning very difficult, so, he decided he’d be cool instead of learn. ... It took three years to actually turn him round but to keep that belief in him and to know that he could do it and to do it was, I think, perhaps an example of [authentic practice]. At the end he walked out and his grades had gone much higher but, more important than that, he actually became my class leader and became a positive role model. That was amazing.

I think that was the authentic bit of it because it took a long time. It would’ve been easy to lose faith and the number of times he was stood down in the first year or so and you thought you’d got somewhere and then he’d do something and you’d think ‘that’s it’.

It was interesting because the beginning of the third year I had him, he was then in Year 6, and I handed him my keys to go and get something. This is a child that two years ago you wouldn’t let anywhere near your keys. One of the other teachers said, ‘Where are you going? Whose keys are those?’ and challenged him. He turned around and grinned and said, ‘They’re my missus’s’, and walked out, which I just thought was gorgeous. ... I think keeping hold of your belief that somewhere in there is a chance to do something. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

For Friend, like several others, working out of her comfort zone challenged the ways she storied herself as a person and professional. When asked how she hoped people describe her, she said:

I would hope that they would say that I'm a nice person. I always hope everybody says that. I guess that I was helpful in their journey. That I was able to offer them information that was useful to them, that I helped them to make informed decisions and provided them with some good skills and strategies to use. (Post-2014)

Later in the interview, she admitted "I'm not good at confrontation; I will always try and just avoid it". When I asked her if there were times she had to move beyond 'nice' to fight for what she believed, she responded:

Yes and I've never been good at doing that. I have an IEP tomorrow where I need to talk about things that I'm concerned about, like the child's progress and the engagement of the family with the programme, and just feeling like they're not engaging. I find anything like that hard. I got offered the opportunity of somebody else saying it for me. I said no, I don't want to say 'Can you come and hold my hand?'. I want to stand up and do it because I think it is important for this child and I think I need to start being more like that and stepping up. Not trying to hide behind other people. (Friend, Post-2014)

Friend noted that her authentic practice stood out the most in the trickiest situations, the ones where she had to stretch herself the most. "It's about knowing that I have done what I needed to do and what needs to be done even if it's not the easiest ... I don't know why that must seem more authentic than the stuff that's not so difficult" (Post-2014).

For Zena and others, challenging work offered an opportunity to put their values on the line. For example, when asked to identify a recent example of authentic practice, Zena spoke of a current student with multiple agencies involved. Her example demonstrates her clear priorities, the chances she took to bring about positive outcomes and the personal characteristics she brought to the task.

Zena: [It's] probably the hardest case I've got. There is still no real answer, but even though it is that difficult, we seem to be heading towards what's

best for the child. [After naming all of the professionals and paraprofessionals involved], it all seems quite messy. ... But the main focus of this case is the student. And you can have those difficult conversations with other agencies, but at the end of the day we are all there for the same reason and that's for that child's success. You and I could think differently about it but we honestly come to the conclusion as to what's best for the child.

Wendy: So why does that one stand out?

Zena: It's such a difficult case. This is the long-suffering, enduring marathon.

Wendy: ... Does the messiness free you to be more creative?

Zena: No, it frees you to be more honest. As a [specialist teacher] you can have an influence, whereas maybe in the classroom you can't. So I am actually putting myself in positions where I am having difficult conversations that I didn't really want to, but have to. Everybody has their own perspective: management have theirs, parents come from somewhere else, medical people come from somewhere else. But at the end of the day we have to work together to help this kid.

Wendy: There are all of these people, but what would you say it is about you that is making this happen?

Zena: Because I don't give up, like a dog at a bone ... (Post-2014)

Practice as lifelong learning

In response to enhanced self-understanding, participants enacted new ways of being and doing. Consistently, this involved actively rejecting the expert model and framing their professional roles as facilitators and connectors instead.

Rejecting the expert model (shifting to 'facilitator', 'connector')

Participants rejected the idea of 'expert', which for them connoted one 'right' way of doing things, and one person holding the knowledge (Focus Group, 2014). Sam felt the pressure of this; having expert status ascribed to her during her practicum was an ethical issue for her. Walking into classrooms, "I turned up and the teacher aides and the teachers were saying, 'Oh great, you have got all the answers now'" (Post-2014). A year later, Sam found her voice in challenging the idea of expert and crafting a more facilitative role for herself. In her explanation, she focuses on the importance of sharing emerging insights, even ones gained from failure, over expert assertions.

... It's not always going to work and that's okay. You have to be authentic in your practice: go back to those parents or the teachers and whoever and say, 'That didn't work but this is what I have learned.' ... I have actually written reports for parents and said, 'Wow, look. ... This was really interesting and I think this is a place to look next.' [Talking with a peer], I was just saying these are all the things that I think I have learnt from [the student] and all the places that I think someone possibly could go with him. I think [it] is really important that you don't ever try and oversell what you are doing. People do and you sit in IEPs all the time and people all want to make a difference. And ... it is not all that collaborative, people wanting to justify ... no one wants to be perceived as a failure. I have never yet had anyone in a meeting with [my own child] say, 'That didn't work. I tried this.' I know this happens it happens all the time. That would be more authentic for me to listen to as a parent, so I am trying to as a practitioner bring that into my connection with parents. (Sam, Post-2015)

Participants crafted their roles in response to each situation, and acted in ways that demonstrated their personal integrity irrespective of how well these actions aligned with their formal role. They explicitly deconstructed the notion of expert, to more effectively work alongside others and to co-create the best outcomes for everyone involved (Focus Group, 2014). This shift was evident in the ways they defined themselves and their roles to others. When asked how she described her role, Friend discussed her discomfort with fancy job titles.

If they are asking about what I do, then I generally tell them what my job is. How I say that kind of changes depending on how I feel at the time. I've found I'm really self-conscious about how it sounds. If you say I am a [specific job title], to me it has always had this kind of ooohh thing to it and I don't ever want to come across like that. (Friend, Post-2014)

They often introduced themselves with bespoke labels that emphasise their role in bridging students, families/whānau, professionals and ideas, using the descriptors of *facilitator* (Lola, Hannah, Finella, Daphne) or *connector* (Sam, Katie, Kirsten).

I don't want to use the word facilitator but I think we are in a way, I would say we are professionals that work collaboratively with students and whānau and schools and teachers to come up with solutions for whatever barriers they are having for the children with special needs. ... I don't necessarily bring all the expertise to the table but we get the expertise in to get the best intervention for the child. ... People call and say, 'We have this problem; come in and fix it'. I see myself more as a facilitator of change: utilising my resources to bring about that change, whether that is from my personal experience, whether that's from utilising colleagues' expertise, whatever that is. (Lola, Post-2014)

Lola hadn't always thought this way; initially she had considered her primary role that of bringing expertise or becoming the expert. I asked her to share examples of casework that had changed her way of thinking about this, assuming she would share positive examples of effective collaboration. In reality, she had learned the most from unsuccessful casework framed within an expert model.

Having a couple of interventions that just, I felt that I didn't get out of it what I needed to. Through the study, that was one thing I learnt a lot this year: the student voice thing. I can't be the decision-maker or firing out suggestions; I need to actually draw it out of other people as well. That is how I see my role now: trying to draw out the information and the ideas from the stakeholders involved; and then from that, as a team, coming up with a decision. Where before, it was more about well obviously they have

tried stuff ... and it hasn't worked so they called in a [specialist teacher]. I will go in, I will see what I see, and then I will make suggestions and then we will come up with a decision. I don't really think I was drawing stuff out of them as much as I could have.

... I have had some total failures. I had one particular boy who just didn't change. Wouldn't change, wouldn't change his behaviour, and it didn't matter what I did. Reflecting on it, he had ideas of where he wanted to go in life and how to get there. The school wanted him to do some other things. In his mind, there was no value to doing those tasks in terms of where he wanted to go. ... I was trying to work with the school and the parents and him. In the end, I didn't draw enough from what was motivating him to actually come up with a successful intervention. I was definitely working with the school more and trying to make decisions *for* him that I thought would be good rather than *with* him. ... Looking back on that now, if I had tapped into that future that was in his mind and drawn motivation for tasks out of that, it definitely would have been a much better intervention. ... Reflect[ing] on that case afterwards ... I realised I wasn't actually doing the best that I could for the kids. I think I was taking too much control rather than being a facilitator and getting it out of them. (Lola, Post-2014)

Lifelong learning was mentioned frequently, as a way to invite and respond to ongoing challenges. Participants storied themselves as lifelong learners with strong commitments to ongoing personal and professional development. Sam, Zena and Belinda left their former roles because they felt it was time for something more; all three said they were no longer being stretched as classroom teachers. Belinda (Pre-2014) reflected on the risks of working in isolation in one classroom, noting "You could actually fall into the trap of doing the same thing year after year after year after year because no one would actually seem to know". Sam (Pre-2014) added "You're quite autonomous in your little classroom ... and you can get away with a lot of really bad habits for really long time, and ... you can wing it a lot of the time". Like both of them, Zena saw the shift to becoming a specialist teacher as a way to grow herself

professionally and personally: “get me out of the school environment ... and ... spread my wings a little bit” (Pre-2014). Two of these participants voluntarily began postgraduate study, one paying for it herself, whilst the third participant changed roles knowing the study was a requirement of the new role.

Other participants wanted to remain in their current teaching roles, but continue to challenge themselves. Ruth (Pre-2014), who also began the postgraduate study voluntarily, made explicit links between lifelong learning and the contribution she hoped to make in her context.

I have a commitment to ongoing education – always, my whole life – and there’s a lot I don’t know. My commitment keeps me going as a learner. What’s kept me going with this course is relating my learning to where I am at here teaching. I know other postgrad students have not done that, they’ve had other career goals, but my career goal is to be here and be in this context. So, as much as I can, I am sharing what I’m learning as I’m going and making my goals and learning about the context where I am.

For Belinda (Pre-2014), lifelong learning fed her need for creativity. She noted the two-pronged benefits of feeding her own creativity, and emphasised the way she better supports her learners.

I love the variety that I get in my day and I love that I can create whatever it is. ... That’s what I’ve always said about teaching, is it’s so much more creative, really. I’m not sitting in a chair in an office doing the same thing day after day after day. That’s kind of who I am, I think. You’ll be out somewhere and you say, “Oh, that’s a good idea,” and you’ll pick up that pamphlet cos you’re gonna use it somewhere just to create an activity around it. ...

I think, too, I really love going to conferences and workshops and stuff, like you’re learning new things ... [but] only if I can apply it. If it’s something I go to and I can’t see a way to apply it to my everyday teaching, I find it a bit

of a waste of time. ... [If] I think, oh, I'm gonna apply that with my kids, it keeps me going, I suppose.

In conclusion, participants in the present study identified important connections between their identity, practice and wellbeing. All three constructs were premised on the importance of self-understanding, co-constructing knowledge with others and in context, and framing challenging circumstances as a rich source of learning. For them, these ideas sat in contrast to the expert model and they storied themselves instead as lifelong learners, facilitators and connectors. Themes identified across the three constructs included: know thyself; practice as relational; practice as ecological and contextualised; practice as challenging, and practice as life-long learning. Alongside growing self-understanding, and knowledge of their contexts, participants identified the enablers and barriers to their practice. These are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Findings: Enablers, Tensions and Mediating Variables for Participants

Participants identified the enablers and barriers they experienced in the development of their professional identity, wellbeing and practice, and these were often flip sides of the same coin. As one example, positive relationships with others could be a support, whilst limited relationships with others could be a barrier. The most clear cut enablers were trust and agency, as they consistently supported participants to work in ways tailored to their clients, and to their own values, beliefs and skills. The other themes are discussed as tensions, to reflect the importance of participants’ positioning as active agents in their contexts. We then return to two key enablers, as they seemed to have a mediating effect overall. The enablers, tensions and mediating variables are depicted in Table 10.

Table 10. Enablers, tensions and mediating variables

| | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Enablers | Trust and agency | |
| Tensions | Balancing/integrating work, study and life | |
| | Tensions in the current education system, as it straddles inclusive and special education | Time Attitudes and deficit discourses The way funding is allocated and framed Being framed as the gatekeeper Being framed as the expert Being framed as the ‘magic bullet’ |
| | Unintended difficulties of ecological practice | |
| Mediating variables | Sense of agency | |
| | Sense of belonging | |

Trust and agency

For every participant, the success or failure of their work hinged on relationships and the extent to which those relationships enabled trust and agency. They framed relationship-building in holistic ways. For Sam it involved “build[ing] a relationship with teachers and staff as well as the students and families, and get[ting] to grips with whatever culture of that learning support centre was, and the dynamics of all the students who were there” (Sam, Post-2014).

Positive relationships with line managers were critical. Authentic practice required management’s trust as it so often involved deviating from the official role and timeline in order to do the work each specialist teacher viewed as essential. Difficulties establishing trust, and exercising agency, often involved conflicts with management over participants’ desire to work with families/whānau. Mia and others saw the trust and full participation of whānau as genuine measures of their effectiveness, whilst management tended to be more focused on outcomes for the child, and adherence to the case management timeframes (Focus Group, 2015).

When you’re working with [Māori whānau], they may have come from a bad educational experience and they won’t trust you ... or the school, and they will create a barrier straight away. Whereas, if it’s a person like me who’s Māori, I’ll make you really relaxed and comfortable. I won’t talk about [referral-related] stuff like that unless you want me to talk about it and you tell me about it.

... I’ll just let it grow from there and you tell me your story when you’re ready. It does take time. I think [our prescribed intervention sequence] needs to understand that. It’s too limited when it comes to relationship building. We are doing the work. I document everything I do, emails, phone calls and meetings. ... There is a pathway; they can see where I’m going with it. It just takes time. I explain that to my [team] leader: ... ‘This will take time and this is just the way it’s going to be at this stage. I’m still data collecting, I’m still building a relationship with the child and the mother.

I'm still working on all of those aspects. I will get there.' Sometimes you don't need to tick the box immediately, I believe. (Mia, Post-2014)

Building relationships with whānau requires additional time, and meeting in spaces and places that work for them. This creates a parallel tension, as many organisations frown upon home visits; the role of the specialist teacher is seen as focused on child outcomes and therefore work in schools/centres is prioritised (Focus Group, 2014). For Zena, navigating this tension meant exercising her agency and making home visits even when those were not initially endorsed by management:

I sneakily get around it. I had two parents, couldn't [schedule a meeting]. I offered to go and visit them after hours, was told I'm not allowed. They understood that. Then we tried to negotiate when and how; wasn't gonna work because of their job commitments. So, I asked to go and visit them in a lunch time. It was close to their work, which was in the city, and I persuaded my boss to let me go. And she did. It turned out to be a really good meeting, and we've had such a good relationship since then. It took six weeks, though, to get that set up. Six long weeks.

... Another one was a boy who ... from a Court order, couldn't live at home or be at home. The place where he was living was occupied by dogs, so, we couldn't go there. So, I asked, 'Where can I go?' I was told, 'You can't do this, this and that,' so, I thought, we'll go to McDonald's. So, we went to McDonald's, that's what we did. ... I find a way, I don't let it go.

Wendy: It sounds, too, like you've got a good relationship with your manager. She trusts you.

Zena: She does. It's a safety issue for her, and I have to convince her that I'm okay. If I feel that I'm entering a place that I feel unsafe, I wouldn't go in. ... I don't feel that I need to be afraid to go. I've never had that problem.

... I think you have to go by your instincts as well. ... I'm not silly, I'm not gonna go into a house that's barking with dogs or there's noise coming out of there that sounds not right. She trusts me. (Zena, 2014)

For Belinda, the issue of trust and agency was somewhat different. As someone with wide-ranging experience in the education sector, she wanted to be trusted to draw on previous knowledge in ways that would support her current role. She shared an example from her work in a secondary context, involving assumptions about what curriculum should and should not be taught at that level. In spite of this, Belinda was committed to going beyond the role, doing what needed to be done rather than just the job she had been hired to do. She wanted to be true to the students and their parents, treating parents as she would want to be treated if it was her child "almost like being the teacher and the parent myself" (Pre-2014). To do this, she required the trust of others in management.

My [manager] has always been a secondary teacher where as I have been primary and secondary. She has always said, 'No, we don't do reading at secondary and we don't do spelling at secondary.' But we had these two parents that really wanted that for their kids. I decided that even against the best wishes of my [manager] that I would provide that for them. But to make it more authentic I didn't just provide it for them. I provided it for everybody and it has gone on to serve me well. (Pre-2014)

As with the other participants who were going beyond their formal role, and working in ways not necessarily endorsed by management, Belinda faced a related tension. She was unsure to what extent she should advocate for her way of working, or quietly work in the ways she saw fit. Discussing a spelling initiative she had introduced, she said:

It was a little bit naughty because even though I am a grown woman and an experienced teacher, I didn't tell her. I did it and then when it was running successfully I told her. ... [My manager] had been worried 'Don't do that, otherwise they will expect it', and I thought, 'Well, I am a parent and

if I wanted a teacher to provide a programme like that for my child I would like to see that they would at least give it a go.'

When she did tell her manager about her initiative, she was pleasantly surprised with the level of trust and agency she had been afforded.

I just said, 'Oh, I put some spelling together' and she couldn't care less. ... She was neither here nor there about it. She trusts me as a professional and it was very much if that is what you are wanting to do, and you are happy to plan it and implement it, I support you. That was quite nice because often we work with people you think are going to pooh pooh your ideas and try and force themselves onto what we are doing and I always try not to be like that. In a sense [I want them to know], 'Yeah, give it a go' (Belinda, 2014).

In each of the examples, the specialist teacher felt supported by management to work in the ways they believed to be most effective; the trust of management enabled them to exercise their agency.

Balancing/integrating work, study and life

Every participant noted the tensions of managing work, postgraduate study and the other aspects of their lives. Whilst some sought 'balance' and some sought 'integration', they all struggled with the demands on their time. Sam stated, "The worst thing for my wellbeing this year has just been the sense of not doing everything well and so the incredible mental pressure of feeling like I'm failing all the time" (Post-2014). For her, separating aspects of her life was not an intention but a byproduct of the ways she was being pulled by family, work and study. "My life was very compartmentalised; I felt like I was a pinball going from thing to thing to thing" (Pre-2014).

Friend also struggled with a life that felt compartmentalised, not by design but by circumstance. She worked in a specialist centre for young children with a specific impairment. As a parent of children with the same impairment, she sometimes

disclosed her personal experiences in her work with whānau. During a time when she could not share aspects of her personal life at work because she feared judgment of her partner, she struggled with having an artificial separation between work and home. She tried to explain the toll it was taking on her: “I feel like I am kind of in two places at the moment, like at work I am *this* ... and at home I am *this*.” For her, it felt like leading dual lives, “feeling like I can’t just, ... [like] the personal ... part of me that comes to work ... isn’t sitting in the room with the parents” (Post-2015).

Belinda wanted more consistency across parts of her life, as she considered herself to be a competent, efficient woman in some roles but not others. As she compared the strategies she used to stay organised across settings, she said, “I wish at home I could be like I am at work. It is kind of easy at work because there is not as much emotion ... I’m better at work than I am at home” (Belinda, Post-2015). Sam also saw herself as less able to hold everything together at home, and believed her primary relationships were most affected by her work and study. On the day she finished the postgraduate study, her son said, “I’ve got my mum back”. For Sam, this was “a real emotional kick in the guts” (Post-2014). She added that her partner “probably feels that he hasn’t had me present either for a lot of this year”, and summarised her year of study as feeling “disappointed that I never got to be my healthy best self” (Post-2014).

Importantly, participants’ sense of balance, or integration, was tainted by their vision of what integration *should* look like. When Katie (Post-2015) spoke of fulfilment, for example, she provided a detailed description of “the mental space where it all comes together”. She envisaged everything in her life coming into alignment:

I feel like I’m doing my job well and I’m getting good feedback; the students are improving and the parents are happy. The schools are happy, I’m happy in my work, and I feel like ... I actually have some value to add to the situation. And there is good work-life balance as well, that I am able to juggle that and feel really content, I guess. That I am meeting my own children’s needs and my needs and my husband’s and friends’ [needs], and that’s all coming together in a nice little package. (Post-2015)

When asked when she last experienced fulfilment in that sense, Katie started to cry. “It feels aspirational ... like it is just unachievable” (Post-2015). Still, rather than critiquing discourses around fulfilment, participants were likely to find fault with themselves for not living up to these ideals. Their difficulties integrating work and life in fulfilling ways were compounded by tensions they encountered in their practice.

Tensions in the current education system, as it straddles inclusive and special education

The pressures of working in education are well documented, and participants identified the familiar tensions of funding, time and workload. “The barriers: the age old time, ... the systems; ... money can be a barrier because you want to be able to put stuff in to support, but there is a pot, there is a finite pot” (Hannah, Post-2014). Predictably, the barriers themselves were exacerbated by participants’ limited sense of agency in addressing the barriers; “Sometimes the barriers are things that you just have no control over” (Hannah, Post-2014). The effects of these barriers were significant; Friend talked about her life as “quite overwhelming at times” (Pre-2014). With the biggest caseload she’d ever carried, alongside study, “I feel like I’m running to keep up with things. ... Sometimes bringing stuff home and then thinking, ‘How am I going to fit this in?’” (Friend, Pre-2014).

Compounding the pressures commonly experienced by teachers, specialist teachers experienced tensions specific to their role in an evolving inclusive education system. Service provision has shifted in Aotearoa New Zealand’s inclusive education sector, and specialist teachers are encouraged to work in more collaborative, consultative and systemic ways. Their work is increasingly focused on the systems around the child, and building the capability of teachers and schools/centres to work effectively with the full range of learners (RTL B Toolkit, 2016). Participants endorsed the overall vision of inclusive education, but felt stymied by the ways it filtered down through what they viewed as strict policies dictating their practice (Focus Group, 2015). Timelines for closing cases did not allow sufficient space for relationship-building, role clarity and creating shared understandings of the situation. Being discouraged from doing home

visits gave a tacit message that the family was not their client and limited their ability to work in truly ecological ways. Lastly, whilst participants were encouraged to zoom their work out to the systems level, this was in conflict with referral processes still predominantly focused on the learning, behaviour and communication difficulties of particular children. As school/centres still requested a service focused on individual students, trying to provide a service focused on the ecology resulted in significant tensions (Focus Group, 2015).

Time

Every participant cited time as a tension. Friend put it succinctly: “Time. There never seems to be enough of it” (Pre-2014). Hannah left her role in a school in the UK, where she had been a teaching Deputy Principal, because of time constraints.

I was just working so many hours, so many hours, it was just hopeless. ... I loved both parts of the job, but if I was doing the DP bit, I felt I should be in the classroom; if I was in the classroom, I felt I should be doing the DP bit. So although I enjoyed it, I knew I couldn't keep going at that rate. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

As work/life balance was her primary motivation for moving to Aotearoa New Zealand, Hannah was discouraged to find herself in a similar predicament here. In her role as a classroom teacher here, “I was asked ... ‘Can you do this?’ and “Can you do this?’ and after five years, I'd got back to the juggling stage again” (Hannah, Pre-2014).

Participants viewed time, and the agency to prioritise how that time was spent, as critical for effective practice. Given the time to build strong relationships, specialist teachers were able to work effectively and efficiently with the team around the child/system (Focus Group, 2015). This was especially important in the current service delivery model, where specialist services are focused on lifting teacher capability as a way to improve outcomes for all learners (RTLB Toolkit, 2016). Whilst subscribing to the vision, participants struggled with doing this in ways that didn't make teachers feel solely to blame for the performance of students. “The hardest part is getting teachers to understand that I am not there to judge” (Kirsten, Post-2015).

For Kirsten, the antidote to this tension was time to build relationships with the team around the learner/s. “The biggest part for me is building those relationships and building that trust; without that, there is no ... moving forward. That is where there is a clash ... because our [service] is so restricted in time” (Kirsten, Post-2015). Kirsten appealed to her manager for longer time with each case “so I can spend the first few weeks getting to know the teacher, building that trust and really building the relationship” but wasn’t always successful. At times, when her manager perceived “the resistance has gone on a little bit too long, and the movement for the student has been tiny, then ‘No, stop now, pull the plug and move along and get whatever results we get” (Post-2015). While this may have been a judicious decision at the management level, Kirsten was keenly aware of how much more she could have achieved given more time and flexibility.

Attitudes and deficit discourses

Every participant identified their caseload as a barrier. However, in light of what they viewed as the continued tension between special and inclusive education, it was the *nature* of the work more than the *amount* of work that impacted them. Participants held a vision of inclusive education, one where diversity would be valued and responded to and all children would be welcomed into their local centres and school. They frequently noted the extent to which the current system fell short of that vision. Caught between stories, where “practitioners are working from these different and sometimes competing paradigms” (Moore, 1999, p. 10), they were frustrated by role confusion within the sector and deficit assumptions made about diverse learners (Focus Groups, 2014 and 2015).

For Belinda and others, people’s attitudes were a bigger barrier than time or money because attitudes dictated how time and money were allocated. “People’s attitudes say ‘oh, but those kids can’t do that’” and this has flow on effects to “how they want to fund the department, the attitude of others staff, the attitude of parents” (Belinda, Pre-2014). Belinda shared the example of a teacher within the school, who did not want her own son to receive learning support. At the parent conference, this teacher said “she didn’t want him in the special needs class with the high and complex special

needs kids, because then everybody would think he was like that” (Pre-2014). Belinda was disheartened to note that deficit attitudes came from within as well as outside of the education sector.

Participants argued that students with disabilities and other needs are marginalised in the current system and that, by extension, specialist teachers working in the space are marginalised as well (Focus Groups, 2014 and 2015). Belinda had a colleague leave the special education unit in the school to work in a special school. “She has been with the department for ten or eleven years and she said the one thing she won’t miss is being treated like a lesser being” (Pre-2014). Pervasive attitudes added to the stress of the job, as shifting attitudes is such a critical part of specialist teachers’ work (Focus Groups, 2014 and 2015). Belinda observed much of her role “is about changing perceptions”, first convincing others she is not “just a learning support teacher” in order to challenge the ways they see the students as well (Pre-2014).

Similarly, some participants bemoaned the limited understanding of needs, including mental health needs, within the service. Lola (Pre-2014) had disclosed a mental health diagnosis to her team leader. Months later, when she called in sick with the flu, assumptions were made.

I feel like I’m being judged sometimes. Like this week ... obviously I’m [physically] sick, but because I had mental health issues last year ... one of my colleagues said, ‘Oh, do we need to have a coffee and a chat?’ It’s like all of my problems are mental health. And it’s like, no, I am asking for your support to have a week off because I’m actually [physically] sick. (Pre-2014)

Lola was frustrated that she was reduced to her mental health needs, that these needs were diminished to problems a ‘coffee and a chat’ might solve, and that this attitude came from someone within the sector.

The way funding is allocated and framed

At the focus group meeting (2015), participants spent considerable time recounting the impact of limited resourcing, particularly around teacher aide support and assistive technology. Irrespective of the specific funding application process, they proclaimed

the battle for money as the most frustrating aspect of their roles and that which elicited the strongest 'fight' in them. Hannah outlined the tension as "resources – or the lack of them – and having to fight for the resources. Three lots of putting in before you get ORS [funding]!" (Focus Group, 2015). Kirsten expanded, "Learning Support Funding – \$200 and we have a meeting and another meeting and another meeting. ... I hate it, I absolutely hate it. Sometimes you just feel like taking out your [debit] card" (Focus Group, 2015). Pia and Kirsten expanded the conversation to limited human resources: "people resources – trying to find the money to get teacher aides in classrooms." They were also distressed by the ethical dilemma posed by under-serving the children, and their sense that successful bids for funding were more about the quality of the application than the depth of the student's need. Pia commented on this, with Kirsten jumping in to finish the thought. "We are talking human rights issues here for some of our special education students, and the hoop jumping and needing to always justify why" (Pia, Focus Group, 2015) "so next time you can go with your argument prepared (Kirsten, Focus Group, 2015)".

Participants critiqued funding pressures, and fought against some of them, but felt forced to go along with others. The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), Ministry of Education funding designed to provide long-term support for students deemed to have ongoing needs, was referenced by the majority of participants as the scheme they least believed in but felt most beholden to. Hannah opposed the time component, and especially spending her time in ways that did not sit comfortably with her. "Perhaps the strongest [example] is [the ORS application]. ... The SENCo and I ... spent 37 hours putting in a ORS application ... and having to list the things that this child couldn't do is horrible" (Pre-2014). Because participants regarded the ORS application as fighting for a piece of a small funding pie, they were compelled to make as strong a case as possible by painting the student in the most negative light. "If I don't play the game, I won't get the funding. If I play it, I might not get it either" (Hannah, Pre-2014).

Having worked in strengths-based partnership with families/whānau prior to seeking funding, participants struggled to shepherd parents through an application process they saw as deficit-focused. "I've already warned [Mum] that this is gonna be really hard and I've explained that it's a game that we have to play." The rationale Hannah

gave herself and parents, for working in ways that she did not believe in, was “there’s only a certain amount of money and that we have to put forward to the assessors that her son really, really needs it.” (Hannah, Pre-2014). Still, the process disheartened participants. “Nobody wants to hear that about their children. ... And especially when we’ve been strength-based up until then, so, it feels ... it’s cruel” (Hannah, Pre-2014).

I think there have to be different ways. There has to be different opportunities for different people to learn ... and for different children to learn in different styles and different ways. This idea that all student will reach this ... level at this age – it causes a huge amount of upset and worry for families and teachers to get them all to that level. ... I think we try and put people in boxes too much. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

Within and beyond the funding application, the problematising of others was their biggest professional struggle, as they saw this as further marginalising and problematising diverse learners. “That is probably the most uncomfortable thing for me, how much I see people being so deficit model in their thinking and their way of relating to their peers et al. as well as to children” (Katie, Post-2015). For Katie, this began to erode her professional identity; like Lola, Katie left the specialist teacher role a few months after this interview. “Because the training has helped me [to] celebrate strengths-based [practice] and how much that is who I am, there is such a mismatch ... [between] what we are trying to do and what’s actually happening out there in classrooms” (Katie, Post-2015).

Being framed as the gatekeeper

Funding is a perpetual issue in education, and misconceptions of the specialist teaching role exacerbated this tension for participants. Participants were often seen as gatekeepers to funding, with funding predetermined to be the most important way to support diverse learners. This meant that initial consultations were often less focused on how else to support children, families/whānau and schools and more focused on the specialist teacher as a means to an end in accessing resources. Hannah encapsulated the tension as schools believing that specialist teachers “have access to lots of money to give to people, [that] we give people teacher aide support – which we

don't – ... or that [we] have access to lots of services" (Post-2015). When asked how it felt to be seen as a means to an end, Hannah replied, "I think it's just the reality of a) misunderstanding and b) ... often by the time I get involved, they are desperate. ... They just don't know where to go anymore, so sometimes it's putting out fires" (Post-2015).

This sense of being a cog in the machine was inadvertently reinforced back at the office as well. Systems for allocating casework often felt impersonal, like 'next one, you're up', rather than aligning with the differing strengths and interests of team members (Focus Group, 2015). "It doesn't seem to matter what experience you have, there seems to be such a haphazard way of allocating cases. ... It is not strengths-based" (Katie, Pre-2015). Katie shared her recent experience of being given "a dyslexic case and an autistic case and we have two people who have amazing strengths in those areas. And they got given cases that were much more aligned to things that I have strengths in" (Katie, Pre-2015). Her use of the word 'case', and identification of students by their labels, also illustrates the tensions of working in strengths-based, inclusive ways to support students who are marginalised but within a system holding onto some of the language of special education.

For Kirsten, Katie and others this tension was indicative of service delivery being prioritised over specialist teacher wellbeing.

It feels like, as a service, we are so concerned about looking after the school and keeping the school happy that sometimes they forget to look after their staff and keep the staff happy as well. Like, there is so much focus on accepting all these referrals. ... There needs to be a bit more balance, that we are actually going to look after our team and we are going to look after the schools to the best of our ability. (Katie, Pre-2015)

Kirsten (Pre-2015) talked about the ways the current service delivery model, and in particular serving so many schools across a large geographic patch far from her home, impacted her wellbeing.

Yesterday was a very long day. It started in darkness and pretty much ended in darkness. It was very long, tiring, and I had lots of meetings and some of those meetings were easier than others. ... I have done the same thing all week. Every day this week has been the same as yesterday. I got in my car [today] just as it was getting dark and I thought, 'I don't think I can do this.' ... I am getting home and I have got no energy to cook a meal, eat a meal, and that emotional wellbeing, it just goes down. (Kirsten, Pre-2015)

Being framed as the expert

This group of specialist teachers still felt positioned as experts, and every participant noted their discomfort with this. "I strongly don't want to be seen as the expert" (Ruth, Pre-2014). In her work with others, Ruth expanded, "it's seeing what we do here and how that would work transferred [to other people's contexts]. ... So we hope that they'll adapt it for their context. We're not saying this is the way to work with this child" (Ruth, Pre-2014). For Sam, "It is almost an ethical dilemma because I'm not an expert. I'm not going in as an expert. I can't promise these families that I'm going to make any material difference" (Pre-2014). Sam could have positioned her approach to casework as effective hypothesis-testing; instead she framed it as not quite enough. "All that I can promise is that I will try. And we will trial this and, at the end of it, we may know something else that doesn't work. We may stumble on something that does" (Pre-2014).

While participants actively eschewed the expert model, their self-efficacy was still often shadowed by it. This was a complex tension: specialist teachers did not want to take on the expert role, and stated that they were not experts, but often sounded like they felt they should be experts. Sam (Pre-2014) laughed darkly as she recounted a scene from the week before, with a student who "lost the plot and then screamed and started punching me". Sam cringed to have "three teachers coming up, 'Are you okay?'" as in her mind, a specialist teacher should be better equipped to handle this sort of situation. "I'm the specialist, I'm going to be working with this child. ... Awesome. And I've replayed that I don't know how many times ... how I shouldn't, you know, what I did that could have made things different" (Sam, Pre-2014). Her

reflective practice was overshadowed by how she constructed expertise, and her embarrassment at having made a mistake. Even as Sam (Pre-2014) spoke of the dangers of being seen as an expert, she used the language of 'yet'. "You don't want to set it up as you're coming in as an expert because I'm not, not yet." Similarly, Friend compared herself to colleagues with various certifications. "I'm one of four [specialists] and my other three colleagues have all got this cert. ... I kind of feel like everybody else is up here and I'm just sort of that little bit lower" (Pre-2014).

Participants were aware of their inclination to look to experts, and to construct people as experts (Focus Group, 2014). Ruth critiqued her own tendency to do this, recounting a conversation with a colleague she referred to as 'her guru', until the friend asked her to stop as the phrase made her uncomfortable (Focus Group, 2014). Lola noted the effects of her colleagues positioning her as the IT expert. As a result of being "pulled into cases for stuff like IT, for apps and ... all the assistive tech stuff because a lot of the older people in my cluster don't know that", she was pulled "away from casework as well." For her, being seen as an expert in one area consequently limited her ability to develop expertise more generally. Lola worked to sustain her breadth, in spite of external pressure to narrow her practice to the IT focus that suited her colleagues. Redressing this was about "just kind of finding that balance" between what stretched and fulfilled her and what fulfilled the needs of her workplace (Post-2014).

The influence of the expert model, and what participants viewed as an alternative professional pathway, is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

Being framed as the 'magic bullet'

The role of the specialist teacher is seen differently by different stakeholders. The Specialist Teaching programme, and Ministry of Education, encourage and equip specialist teachers to work at the systems level, enskilling teachers and schools to respond to the needs of all learners. However, referrals still typically centre on problems with individual children and there is still "the misconception out in the community that we are going to come in and fix it" (Daphne, Post-2015). Earlier in the year, Daphne expanded on this barrier as "seeing the [specialist teacher] as a glorified teacher aide, or the magic bullet". She felt hamstrung by schools' perception that she

would “come in and take the child away and do all the work with them and suddenly ... the problem is gone simply because the [specialist teacher] is the answer” (Daphne, Pre-2015). Hannah (Post-2015) echoed this misconception, adding that teachers sometimes want to hand complete responsibility for the student over to the specialist teacher. “It’s a case of ‘they’re yours now. I am their teacher, but actually ... you deal with them, you fix them’.” Consequently, quite a bit of time is spent clarifying and re-clarifying roles. “One of the first things that I will say is, ‘I haven’t got a magic wand. I can’t fix them. But I will come and work alongside you.” (Hannah, Post-2015).

Katie reported how “the mismatch between what the classroom teacher expects and what’s happening for the child” impacted her ability to work effectively (Post-2015). With pressure from management to work at the systems level, and pressure from the schools/centres to remove and ‘fix’ the child, specialist teachers often started a new case by doing less effective work while slowly trying to shift perceptions of how they could contribute to the situation. Katie shared a particular example of withdrawing a student from the classroom three times a week to work on his writing one-to-one, when she knew class-wide interventions and more holistic support of the student were what was needed.

But [the school] are saying, ‘That’s great’ because that’s what they wanted. And [the student] is happy, and if that’s all it takes then this is easy, but. ... Twenty weeks with him and then it’s gone. I feel most of the time that it’s a teeny tiny drop in the massive ocean. Is it really making a difference long-term? (Katie, Post-2015)

The pressure of doing the job requested by schools and required by management, rather than the job they believed needed to be done, created a significant amount of stress for participants. Belinda described the conflicting pressures as “like being in a flower press. ... You have got the staff, and the kids and the parents pushing up, and then you have got the ... managers pushing down. And you are just slowly being spread out like a pansy on a wooden deck” (Post-2015).

Unintended difficulties of ecological practice

Specialist teachers work in ecological ways, examining the interactions between the child/family and every layer of the ecology and to inform the least intrusive plan likely to produce the greatest positive outcomes (Annan, 2005). Viewing referral situations so broadly, it can be difficult to put boundaries around one's role and one's practice.

Another tension is the fact that you know where you want to go, and at times it is not possible to go there. At times, you can bend a few things, but ... other times you stop, that's not your role. ... Sometimes ... you want to get more into the social work role. ... Sometimes you get carried away and you end up going off on all sorts of tangents, not that it doesn't need doing. (Hannah, Post-2015)

For the most part, Hannah consulted with others and continually reflected on whether or not what she wanted to do was part of her role. Like others, the one area where she resisted narrow conceptions of her role was in her work with families/whānau: "Getting involved and doing things with the family and supporting the family and the real whānau support bit, sometimes you do that" (Hannah, Post-2015). Zena was given a similar message in relation to the extent she was able to work alongside families/whānau, and responded in a similar way.

When I joined the [service], I was told 'You're not a social worker'. See, for me that's quite difficult not to be that way. One of my colleagues ... would say, 'How do you do that? How do you go up to the [family's] door and knock?' And I'm thinking, 'How do you not?' ... How do you not make that connection? ... One of my values is to make sure that whānau know who I am and I know who they are, so I can understand their daughter or son. (Zena, Pre-2014)

Even when participants were clear on how they might best contribute to the situation, they often met with resistance from others. For Kirsten, the most challenging aspect of ecological practice was shifting from supporting students to supporting teachers. Ideally, she saw her role as "a support for the teacher and the student" (Post-2015). She felt she could balance these two overarching roles, "ultimately for the student's

gain, but really as a support for the teacher, to work alongside the teacher to implement strategies for the student so that the student is included and has access to the curriculum” (Post-2015).

Notwithstanding benefits of sustainability and outcomes far beyond the referred child, Kirsten noted that teachers weren’t always pleased to be the new focus of specialist support.

I have found a lot of resistance to what I do. ... We are seen to be somebody coming in to upskill the teacher. And that was not what I felt; I felt I was supporting the teacher. ... Teachers don’t want to be upskilled – they don’t. There is resistance to that. So when we go in, they don’t see it as supportive; they see us going in to assess their competency around working with students with ... special needs.

But I don’t see it that way. I want to support them, and the way that I look at it is you can’t know everything about everything. ... But there is a lot of talk about teacher competence ... and I think that is where the resistance is coming from. (Kirsten, Post-2015)

Katie mentioned a complementary tension, also derived from differing perceptions of who was the client. Referrals primarily come from schools and teachers, which can weight their perspective of the referral situation over that of the family/whānau. Consequently, Katie struggled to prioritise the needs and wishes of children and families/whānau, teachers and schools within the current referral system. “Our [management] fully aims to please the schools and keep them quiet and keep them happy. They are number one and what we need and what we do [for whānau] is completely secondary” (Katie, Post 2015).

Importantly, not every participant had agency in determining how best to work in a particular ecology. In Katie’s team, schools were positioned as the client; this shaped the way specialist teachers were able to respond to referral situations. “I have watched so many people be persecuted for the most ridiculous complaints from a school, instead of our [management] actually standing up for them” (Katie, Post-2015).

For Katie, this created a sense of vulnerability. “I feel so vulnerable in the role. It feels like some of my colleagues would try to have my back, but you know that can only go so far” (Katie, Post-2015). In this way, it was the mediating variables of belonging and agency (or lack thereof) that impacted participants’ ability to negotiate professional tensions.

Mediating variables

Even as participants expounded on the barriers to their effective practice, identity development and wellbeing, two mediating variables appeared over and over: having a sense of agency and having a sense of belonging. As strong themes, which seem to mediate the pressures on teachers, they are a critical aspect of the conversation around teacher wellbeing and practice.

The need for a sense of agency

In an ideal world, teachers would understand, have input into, and believe in the policies that guided their practice. They would have the trust of management, and the freedom to enact these policies in ways that were good for the organisation and the children, families/whānau and systems whilst drawing on and growing the specialist teachers’ particular strengths. Katie knew that her practice needed to reflect well on the organisation, but wanted the latitude to act in ways that fitted for her as well. “We are always on show ... for the service and that is made quite explicit to us. I still wanted an opportunity where I could ... be who I am and do what I do” (Katie, Pre-2015).

For participants, many of the structures put in place to support consistent and effective practice felt premised on limited trust in their ability and independent decision-making. They cited rigid practice sequences, reporting mechanisms and other accountability processes as evidence of their work in a post-trust climate (Focus Group, 2015). Zena declared as her biggest barrier, “not [being able to] follow your true instincts, because my instincts might be different to somebody else’s. Especially when you’ve got leaders telling you you can’t do this, and you can’t do that. To me, that’s a barrier” (Zena, Pre-2014). Limited trust equated to additional time spent documenting their practice; Mia summarised this barrier as “Admin – all the

paperwork and the process around the paperwork, and when you have to submit things ... It's a huge part of our role, tying everything up and getting it signed off, and having meetings around admin" (Mia, Focus Group, 2015).

In a climate of trust and transparency, participants would be able to negotiate their roles in ways that worked for both the individual and the organisation. Zena, for instance, knew the regulations against home visits were based on personal safety. She stuck firmly to the importance of meeting families/whānau in mutually negotiated spaces (typically homes, but also cafes and marae), but could appreciate her manager's duty of care. Because her manager trusted Zena's decision-making and ability to keep herself safe, they were able to come up with a mutually satisfactory arrangement (Zena, Post-2015). Others did not have transparency or trust. Katie, for example, had serious doubts that specialist services set up in this way could bring about positive change. "It really sat uncomfortably with me that, actually, my chances of changing teachers' practice in this role are really, really limited" (Katie, Pre-2015). Furthermore, she felt limited in what she could do to change this dynamic.

Unsatisfactory policies were made worse by participants' limited understanding of the logic behind policies and limited agency in challenging or shaping them (e.g. Katie, Post-2015; Kim, Post-2015). In situations Kirsten described as "this is the rule, follow it" (Post-2015), participants felt stymied by the system, management and status quo. "Our managers don't inform us of changes, and [just] put policies in place. ... I don't understand why." The least Kirsten needed was to understand the thinking behind a policy, especially those which sat less comfortably for her. "I need to rationalise it ... [or] I find it really hard to move forward, especially if I can't see any logic in it" (Kirsten, Pre-2015).

The biggest tension for me in my job and so many times I've questioned why I'm doing it because it gets me down so much, so much ... is last minute changes to major initiatives without telling us. If management decides that they want to change something, or if they have to justify something at their level, they come to us and say 'You actually need to do this' and I say 'But I've done it, it's just on this form'. 'No you have to put it

on this form, and you've got two days to do it and you have to juggle to do those things.' No explanation, just do it. (Kirsten, Focus Group, 2015)

Limited trust in their practice felt like a questioning of their professionalism (Focus Group, 2015). "You'd expect to be equal in the sense that you're a professional, and you're going to perform and do the job" (Mia, Pre-2014). They believed their professionalism was devalued and their development was narrowed, as they were asked to follow prescriptive practice sequences and were discouraged from taking risks or trying something new. "I couldn't grow ... because I was micromanaged by my [team] leader" (Mia, Pre-2014). Katie echoed the concern that case management procedures undermined her sense of herself as a developing professional.

It feels like, we are professional, can we not be trusted? I think there are better ways [case management meetings] could be done so that actually it was seen as much more supportive. Because, to me, it feels much more like, 'Well, where are you up to?! What have you done?!' instead of 'Hey, what have you been thinking ... is there anything I can help you [with] ... have you considered this?' But ... it is feels more like a tick box: you have to accomplish this and if you haven't you are underachieving. (Katie, Pre-2015)

Not always believing in the work, or having the freedom to adjust their practices to meet organisational obligations while remaining true to their own effective practices, served as a significant barrier to fulfilment (Focus Group, 2015). Kirsten (Post-2015) summarised this best, as she contrasted her vision of the role with the realities of her role.

Although [the role] fulfils me to a point, it is not the role that I thought it was going to be. The aspect of fulfilment that I don't have is making the difference that I wanted to for students, because there are so many hurdles, so many barriers, in the way. ...

In life, if there are barriers, you work hard to remove those. But in my role, there are barriers that I cannot remove. ... I feel it as a sense of ... a lack of

fulfilment rather than frustration. Because I have kind of got over the frustration, but it is that sense of fulfilment that I thought I would have that I haven't got ... and I don't know how to get over it. ...

You try, try, try and it's almost like you build yourself up for success and you fall over and you build yourself up and how many times can I do this?
(Kirsten, Post-2015)

The need for a sense of belonging

The majority of participants were former classroom teachers; although some (five) still worked in one setting, most (nine) had moved into itinerant roles. In their previous roles, participants felt a sense of belonging in their classroom, their syndicate, their school and their school community. Often, this sense of belonging mitigated other job stressors. Describing her time as a classroom teacher, Kirsten reflected "resources are restricted, time is restricted and assessments are restricted ... [but] you work as a team, you work very much in a team" (Post-2015). Katie was a high school counsellor prior to becoming a specialist teacher; she also missed the frequent contact with others she'd had in her previous role. "I could see close to 100 students in a week ... because some of them would just swing by and they just needed that little top up. I could do that, no problem." Located in the centre of the building, she saw herself as a central part of the school. "My door was open and [students] could walk in and just flop down on the chair and they just needed a moment to vent. Or even staff would do that" (Post-2015).

For participants, limited agency was compounded by their limited sense of belonging. The itinerant nature of the specialist teaching role "feels completely disconnected" (Katie, Post-2015). Katie's sense of belonging was further diminished by the hot desking introduced in her office; there were no longer dedicated spaces for people, and everyone shared a smaller number of desks in a large open space. Now, in addition to not feeling she belonged in the schools in which she worked, she felt she didn't belong in her own office either. Describing her sense of dislocation, she shared "part of it is the itinerant aspect of it, part of it is our setup with no space". Katie was discouraged at having "nowhere that's mine, you know, that's where you can find me.

There is no sense of belonging, so that has a huge impact for me personally” (Katie, Post-2015). Like many others in her office, Katie responded to the hot desking arrangement by working from home “because at least I feel like I belong there”, which may have increased her sense of isolation.

Specialist teachers themselves are the face of the larger service, an uncomfortable role during systems changes with which the school might not be pleased. Katie noted the negative opinion of her specialist service out in the community: “The teachers – in general, not all of them – have some big barriers up about not being welcoming of the service” (Katie, Pre-2015). At one point, Kirsten was at ten different schools, “meeting a whole range of people and a whole range of situations. ... We didn’t know who we were going to meet ... so there were a lot of grey areas and treading on eggshells” (Kirsten, Post-2015). In the absence of established relationships, “going to so many different schools, [involves] constantly adjusting ... trying to figure out how they work, what is their philosophy, what do they say is their philosophy and what’s actually underneath that?” (Katie, Post-2015).

Whilst the majority of participants identified similar tensions around belonging (Focus Group, 2015; Post-2015 interviews) the tensions were still nuanced. Their perspectives were influenced by their own belief system and former practices, their role and setting prior to becoming a specialist teacher, and the context of their specialist teaching role. Their interpretation was also influenced by the sense of belonging they had felt in their former role, their level of support outside of work and the extent to which their social emotional needs were met outside of work.

In conclusion, participants identified a range of enablers and barriers, and these were often flip sides of the same coin. The enablers may resonate for teachers, as they are premised on relationships and support, the importance of agency and the importance of belonging. Some of the tensions are a reflection of an education system caught in between stories, and participants felt this the most keenly in their new roles as specialist teachers.

Chapter 6 – Findings and Discussion: The Ways Participants Positioned Themselves Within and Against the Tensions of Their Roles

The work of specialist teachers is complex, filled with both intrinsic rewards and perpetual tensions. Participants in the present study became specialist teachers to further their passions and interests; specifically, they chose to advocate for children and families/whānau who have been marginalised by the current education system. In doing so, they have taken a position on the importance of equity and fairness, inclusion and relationships (Focus Group, 2015). Kelchtermans (2008) asserts that there are inevitably moral and political consequences of taking a stand; aware of this, these specialist teachers made clear where they stood and whose side they were on.

In doing so, participants navigated a range of challenges, including policies that were not always helpful, lingering notions of special education that continued to shade their work and other barriers to inclusive education and learning for all. Specialist teachers were doubly impacted by these tensions: whilst navigating them personally they were also supporting teachers grappling with the same pressures. Participants in the current study worked to find the right amount of support and challenge for themselves as they tried to provide the right amount of support and challenge for others. They practised alongside teachers in strengths-based ways, pushing the boundaries for teaching that considers all children as its starting point.

Findings from the present study suggest that the variety in a specialist teaching role is both a benefit and a stressor. No two days are the same, and every referral situation is different. For participants, this variety engendered and required lifelong learning and identity development: they were challenged to remain nimble, constantly refining their skills and their jobs while keeping their values at the forefront of their practice. The participants in this study indicated the importance of stance, supports and stamina in sustaining their ability to practise fiercely and find fulfilment. Supported by the

combination of these three elements, enacted in their practice and rooted in their 'why', they found greater fulfilment in the job.

As noted in the Methodology chapter, the original contribution of this research is a conceptual framework for developing and maintaining the fulfilment of teachers. This framework, *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*, was developed alongside participants in the second phase of the present study and has potential utility to support teacher fulfilment at several layers of their ecology. Although the framework was developed alongside teachers working as specialist teachers, every participant had recent or current classroom experience and our intention was to co-construct a framework that could be used more widely with teachers and others in education.

At the level of the individual teacher, these ideas may support professionals to identify and manage the barriers, enablers and sources of fulfilment in their personal and professional contexts. At the systems level, the framework could be used to develop team and organisational identity as well as the infrastructure for supporting individuals within a system. In tertiary education in particular, at the student level, the framework could serve as one of the explicit ways early career specialist teachers consider and develop their professional identity and fulfilment. At the programme level, the framework may prove useful as an infrastructure for course content and processes. For example, in a recent programmatic change evolving out of the present study, Specialist Teaching students now spend their first half-day on campus learning about and reflecting on their own stance, supports and stamina as preparation for postgraduate study. Content on each of these areas is then interrogated in the first domain of their first year coursework and woven throughout their study.

The framework is most easily discussed as five discrete sections whilst acknowledging the interconnected nature of these dimensions and how they form part of the whole. Friend emphasised the need to consider the constructs as a whole in her metaphor of a rubber band ball, whereby fulfilment through stance, supports and stamina had to be "all those rubber bands ... all bunched up together" (Focus Group, Post-2015). Later, following the final individual interviews, practising fiercely was added as a

mediating variable or the *how* of the framework. Chapter 6 builds up the components of the framework; in Chapter 7, the framework as a whole is discussed. Both chapters integrate theory and findings in developing an original contribution to teaching practice and teacher education.

The five dimensions are presented in the order that made most sense to participants. For a long time, I referred to these ideas sequentially as stance, stamina and supports as a way to achieve fulfilment. Repeatedly, participants switched the order to stance, supports and stamina. As Kirsten (Post-2015) said, “They kind of go in the opposite order [because] without the support you can’t have the stamina, and you don’t feel safe to maintain your stance”. Where I had considered fulfilment as the end product, participants argued it fed into the entire process and is thus a natural place to start. Following the final interviews, participant feedback indicated that stamina was at the intersection of stance and support, with all three constructs mediated through fierce practice, as shown in Figure 7.

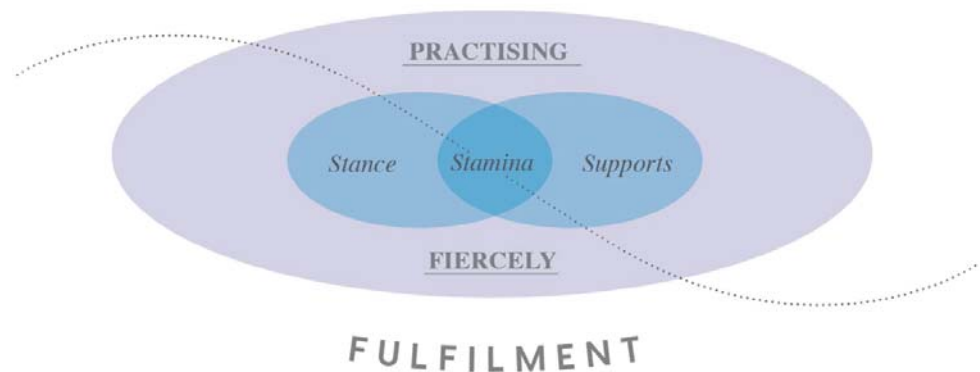


Figure 8. Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina

This first section discusses the construct of fulfilment as co-constructed by the participants. For them, fulfilment tapped into their *why*, and their sense of having done a good job, having lived a good life and having lived out their values. Practising

fiercely was their *how*: it included the ways they framed and co-created their roles to be able to enact their stance, supports and stamina in harder and softer ways. Lastly, participants' *what* included stance and supports: the inner and outer contributors to their stamina. Each of these components was balanced between individual and collective components, connoted by the wavy line dividing each construct in the diagram.

Table 11. Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Fulfilment (WHY) | Fulfilment as relational Fulfilment as ongoing and generative The most difficult work as the most fulfilling | |
| Practising fiercely (HOW) | Practising fiercely as relational wellbeing | Fighting the good fight |
| Stance (WHAT) | Focused inward: Who participants understood themselves to be Focused outward: How participants enacted their self-understanding | Stance as a deeper, more integrated, self-understanding Stance as genuine Stance as connectedness Stance as physical and dynamic |
| Supports (WHAT) | Participants' internal characteristics Other people as supports Supporting others Cultures of support | |
| Stamina (WHAT) | Stamina as intentional in their lives Stamina as continual recalibrating of practice Learning from imbalance 'When I knew better, I did better' | Getting out of balance to get back into balance The reality and discourse of 'busy-ness' |

Fulfilment (WHY)

He tina ki runga, he tāmōre ki raro

In order to flourish above, one must be firmly rooted below

As noted previously, this research initially considered the construct of wellbeing rather than fulfilment. Participants explored notions of wellbeing throughout the study; however, their responses tended to narrow in focus to physical wellbeing and to stories of being unwell rather than well. In response to this, I shifted to discussions of fulfilment toward the end of the research.

Considering the idea of Fulfilment prompted more expansive conversations. Kirsten's (Post-2015) explanation of fulfilment best represents traditional understandings of fulfilment, and the thoughts of many participants. "Fulfilment to me, in my life, means a sense of contentment. ... If I am happy with what I have achieved then I am contented with it; I am at peace with what I have done, with what I have chosen." Hannah (Post-2014) also stressed the importance of practising in ways she would be proud of later. "You have got to be able to live with the decisions [you make]. ... There is no point in looking back, ... things will have changed anyway, so there is no point in thinking 'Oh, if only, if only'". With that focus on the here-and-now for fulfilment in the future, Hannah advised, "you just make your decisions" (Hannah, Post-2014).

Lola (Post-2014) provided a tangible example of casework which had given her that sense of fulfilment, which she framed as "Just seeing that you can make a difference, knowing that I can make a difference" (Lola, Post-2014). For her, it was "when parents say they noticed a change":

Like [a] boy whose memory was just terrible, but I used iPad apps and this and that and he had had a huge intervention. Mum, at the post meeting, was almost crying. She was saying, 'I can't believe it, he can even tell me things that I have forgotten off the grocery list at the supermarket now.'

Because he could actually remember it now, whereas before he couldn't remember stuff, and it was like, 'Yay, I helped actually in that'. (Lola, Post-2014)

Early on, participants and I considered fulfilment as a retrospective notion: a feeling of satisfaction in response to a good day's work or a life well lived. Finella and Mia challenged and broadened this lens. They stated that, through a Māori lens, fulfilment was at the beginning and middle as well as the end, emanating from people as well as flowing back in. Finella compared fulfilment to *mauri* which can be loosely translated as life force. She defined it as "that spark within each of us that supports and even drives us to go out and give in fulfilling ways" (Post-2015). Mia considered fulfilment and wellbeing or "overall hauora" as "looking at your wairua, and that's your spirituality as well as your strength inside you" (Post-2015). After Finella and Mia shared these enriched understandings with the focus group, the group as a whole embraced an expanded notion of fulfilment. Their ideas fit well with the emphasis of positive psychology, where eudaimonic wellbeing is framed in a cycle of "being good by doing good" (Steger, Kashdan & Oishi, 2008) and we are cautioned "if happiness is on the opposite side of success, your brain never gets there" (Achor, 2011, 9:34).

Overall understandings of fulfilment had three branches. Fulfilment was seen as relational: participants were fulfilled to the extent they were able to enrich the fulfilment of others. Fulfilment was ongoing and generative, as well as a retrospective exercise, and it was often gleaned from the most difficult work and most difficult times in participants' lives.

Fulfilment as relational

For the specialist teachers in the present study, fulfilment was a relational construct. They equated fulfilment with the ways they lifted the fulfilment in other people; the extent to which others were fulfilled informed the extent to which they themselves were fulfilled. As an example of this, Ruth related her fulfilment to "when you step back and you can see the child engaged or you can see the whānau engaged and really seeing their child, seeing their child as a learner" (Pre-2014). In early childhood inclusive education, she viewed these moments as hard-won as "families are still

coming to terms that their child has a disability and ... they've only really been told everything that their child can't do and had that hope or the rug pulled out from underneath them". Ruth's fulfilment was thus inextricably linked to "seeing those moments when the whānau recognise that their child is capable and content" (Ruth, Pre-2014).

After our Post-2014 interview, Lola emailed me an image of an epiphyte as a metaphor for wellbeing and fulfilment, as shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9. Lola's metaphor for fulfilment

[The epiphyte] looks like the vines supporting the tree – and in a sense it can. It lives off other plants but it is NOT a parasite. It needs its own air, moisture, nutrition to survive – but it cannot exist by itself.

I was thinking [the epiphyte] is a bit like us: ... we need our own air, moisture etc. for our wellbeing, but we also rely on others for our wellbeing. Without them we cannot grow and thrive either in terms of our wellbeing or authentic practice. The 'crazy' growth shows you how different aspects and paths can interconnect ... and it is different for every epiphyte just as it is for every person. (Personal communication, October, 2014)

Later the following year, for the final focus group (2015), each person was asked to share a metaphor for fulfilment, stance, supports and stamina. Like Lola, Mia used a tree as her metaphor, as shown in Figure 10.

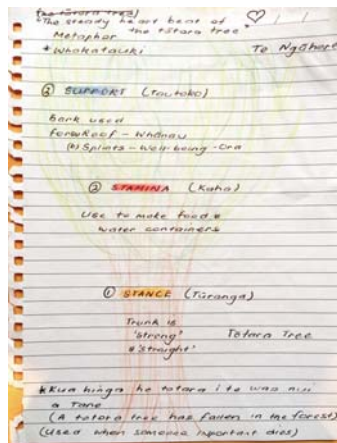


Figure 10. Mia's metaphor for fulfilment

I have an image in my head and it is a totara tree. ... I could see the parts of it becoming your stance and your stamina and your supports. ... If we break down the totara tree, the stance is it is a very strong tree. It lasts for many years, it goes straight up and it's strong and straight, so I connected that to stance. And then for the support, the bark is used for a roof so it can hold your *whānau* (family) underneath the roof quite nicely. And then the splines, if someone hurts themselves, is for your wellbeing or your *ora* (wellbeing) or your *whānau*. And then stamina, they use the tree to make containers for food and water so that's your stamina. (Mia, Focus Group, 2015)

Lola focused on the ways we support our own wellbeing through our work with others, while Mia shifted the focus to supporting others through her own fierce practice. She built on the conversation we'd had the previous year, where she'd defined fulfilment as being able to "bring [the authentic self] out of people. Empowers them to do and be

who they are. For me, it's powerful to use what I've learnt to support other people" (Post-2014). Applied to her own practice, Mia decreed her stance as one of *whakawhanaungatanga* (building relationships). As she supports others in culturally responsive ways, they in turn contribute to the growth of her identity as a culturally responsive professional.

So I saw the totara tree, the steady heartbeat of the totara tree, as first and foremost the *whakawhanaungatanga* that we have and then building up from there. ... My practice has changed immensely because I'm finding myself in that cultural responsiveness [role] and becoming a part of that [for] the people that I work with now. ... My fulfilment is my culture and who I am, finding out more about that and sharing it with others through *whakawhanaungatanga*. (Mia, Focus Group, 2015)

In the final interviews, each person was asked to reflect back on the metaphors shared at the final focus group meeting and to identify the ones that resonated with them. No one had seen Lola's metaphor, as she had left her specialist teaching role and the present study at that point, but every participant noted Mia's metaphor. They appreciated her emphasis on the relational and reciprocal nature of fulfilment. They also valued Mia's vision of herself as a living resource for others, with her fulfilment resulting from the fulfilment of others. Several participants (e.g., Kirsten) further emphasised the roots of the tree, as a way to connote professionals' histories and experiences, values and beliefs, powerful in shaping their practice but less visible, "much like an iceberg" (Kirsten, Post-2015).

Fulfilment as ongoing and generative

As mentioned previously, several of the participants and I had conceptualised fulfilment as a looking-back exercise akin to reflecting on a job well done or a life well lived. In interviews and focus group discussion, bringing a cultural lens to the construct, several participants extended these traditional interpretations of fulfilment. Finella (Post-2015) acknowledged the conventional connotation of looking back, but emphasised that teachers need to see fulfilment differently for it to have that strong connection with their wellbeing. She and others recognised fulfilment at the beginning

and the middle of the process rather and in evolving cycles of reflective practice. They approached their lives in ways that felt authentic for them from the beginning, for example heavily involving parents in their work around the child and positioning parents as the experts. They then noted the momentum in the middle of a piece of work, once shared understandings had been generated and the trajectory felt established. Thus, fulfilment was less about outcomes and reflecting back on outcomes, and more about specialist teachers' hope, trust and confidence that their actions were part of something ultimately constructive (Focus Group, 2015).

Sam's metaphor of fulfilment illustrated this shift away from outcomes: she envisaged a circuit, with professionals tripping various parts of the circuit to activate the light at the end. Her metaphor stemmed from her son's current interest in circuit boards, and his past involvement with specialists when he was first diagnosed with autism. Thinking back to professionals involved in his early years, when he "still couldn't speak, was melting down constantly" (Focus Group, 2015), Sam doubted they would believe how well he is doing now. "Those professionals never got to see the light that they helped switch on" (Focus Group, 2015).

Reflecting on the way she constructed fulfilment early in her own practice, "I wanted to see the light; I wanted to make that difference. And if the light didn't come on, then I hadn't succeeded." She noted how unhelpful this long-term and retrospective take on fulfilment was in terms of her own wellbeing. "Fulfilment was the light going on for me and so I was sometimes frustrated with my practice because I wasn't seeing that" (Sam, Focus Group, 2015).

Sam went on to describe her circuit metaphor:

But now I've reframed my metaphor and I am just part of the circuit. I may not see the light come on, and even if my bit doesn't work and that light never comes on, somebody else is going to pick up a different path in the circuit and go 'okay that didn't work, so I'm going to try this'. ... Now my fulfilment is knowing I fought that good fight, I made that my connection and I have faith it's going to make a difference even if I don't see it. (Focus Group, 2015)

In terms of stance and stamina, Sam found that focusing on the outcome led to frustration as specialist teachers so seldom see the long-term fruits of their work with children and families/whānau. By focusing on her input instead, she could trust that her work would lead to something positive down the road without actually seeing that change. Returning to Finella's (Post-2015) point, fulfilment is "when you know exactly who you are and how you are going to contribute. ... Fulfilment could be accepting what you can and can't do ... accepting the good, the bad and the ugly and it's how you respond to all of those factors, all of those experiences". In this way, fulfilment is not just the culmination of stance, supports and stamina, but feeds back into each in an ongoing and generative way.

Finella reflected on the three states of Mauri Ora: Mauri Tu (the uprising), Mauri Oho (awakening), Mauri Ora (wellbeing) as a way to explain the evolving nature of fulfilment and how it is equally important in the beginning and middle as it is at the end. She (Post-2015) shared an example of fulfilment in the middle as "collaborating on a level that is strategic, that is going to build sustainability". She could feel this fulfilment, in the moment, "when you are bouncing, in a way that you know that the work that you are doing together is going to help not just [the referred student] but all of the children" (Post-2015). When asked if she needs to start seeing the positive results before she feels fulfilled: "No. To me, once you are on that trajectory ... you can begin to predict" (Finella, Post-2015).

Exemplified by Katie's idealised vision of fulfilment shared in the Barriers section of Chapter 5, concentrating on the outcomes of our work rather than the process, served as a barrier to participants' fulfilment. Having one's fulfilment contingent on variables outside of oneself, and beyond one's control, brought tensions of its own. As Lola expressed, it felt "pretty sad, actually, if I am setting my own value on how others are valuing me" (Post-2014). Sam's circuit board metaphor resonated for people because it was a fulfilment based on effort rather than achievement, where knowing one had done one's best mattered more than outcomes which they may or may not ever see. Her metaphor strikes the balance of outcomes for others and our own input that makes up *practising fiercely*.

The most difficult work as the most fulfilling

For the specialist teachers in the present study, fulfilment often came from acting with integrity through the most challenging work. This work included the difficult conversations, the children and parents who were hardest to build relationships with and the students and systems that were hardest to support.

Fulfilment never came from the 'easy road', which was a central distinction between our conversations about *fulfilment* and our earlier discussions around *wellbeing*. Focusing on wellbeing led participants to narrow their work and create boundaries around their practice, such as saying 'no' more (Friend, Post-2015) or not checking emails outside of work (Belinda, Post-2015). For this group of participants, in contrast, fulfilment does not appear to be influenced by *how much you do*, but *how much you love what you do*.

Lola's story exemplified this distinction as she described her most and least fulfilling professional roles. She begins by describing the role she found most fulfilling, arguably more work but work in which she could draw on and integrate two disparate areas of passion and expertise: biology and physical education.

That would've been when I was teaching rather than [this specialist teaching role] funnily enough. ... I'd had years where I was only teaching bio and it was just too much theory, and other years where I was teaching just PE, but then I felt like I was getting a bit bored and I wasn't using my science knowledge. So, in that year where I got to do such a variety of different subjects I felt the most useful and I was utilising everything I could. It was a good balance for me. ... I would say that's when my practice was most authentic because all parts of my interests were being met and I was happier in myself and I could portray that and help the kids more. ... I found that year probably the easiest, which I don't really know why, unless it's just because I was happier. ... I could pretty much teach the kids whatever I felt like teaching, what was important, so I adapted the curriculum to however I thought I needed to.

Lola contrasted that experience with her work as a specialist teacher, where the work was not harder per se but she found it harder to do the work effectively. Without the sense of belonging and networks, and the ability to act with agency in her own work, she did not find the fulfilment she was looking for. Her examples highlight her needs for belonging and agency, as discussed in the previous chapter.

I do know up here I've found my job a lot harder because I don't know who to turn to for different things. If I need something for the kids up here I feel like I spend half my time trying to find it, where at [former place] I knew who to go to and I could get stuff done faster. I like to get things done as fast as I can. I don't like to see kids suffer or just unnecessary wait time and red tape. I think I had more freedom [in the prior job] to do what I wanted. ... Up here, things are very prescribed and you've got an actual practice sequence. and I don't really have a lot of freedom to adapt things as much as I could back then. (Lola, Pre-2014)

Lola ultimately left her specialist teaching role, and returned to the classroom teaching role she had left two years earlier.

Critically, understandings of wellbeing and fulfilment did not come easily to these participants; they were crafted after years of reflection, and often in response to having been unwell. Participants often revised their understanding of wellbeing and fulfilment after difficult times in their lives.

We've learnt to understand what's important in life. And actually having the big car and the big house isn't really very important at all. Now we can sit back and say that having got that and had a taste of it. ... We know what's important to us. We had to go down that road, we had to go. You get onto the treadmill and 'I'll take the next stage, I'll take the next stage' and 'Okay, it means I'll work Saturdays as well but I'll take the next stage' and 'Look, I've got a shiny car' but does it really matter in the end? What really matters? When you sit back and watch somebody you love becoming ill by doing it, that's when you say 'Hang on a minute. It doesn't matter. That's not what's important'. (Hannah Pre-2014)

Kelchtermans (2008) validates the importance of considering teacher wellbeing, but with the caution that it is too often misconstrued as “a synonym for ‘cocooning,’ for ‘wellness’ (the kind of happy physical and mental state that is promised in fitness centres)” (p. 31). This echoes my experience in the first phase of the present study, when querying participants’ wellbeing evoked responses about physical wellbeing, often with an emphasis on being unwell. As Kelchtermans suggests, wellbeing did seem to connote pulling back, saying no, and putting tighter boundaries around one’s life: “an alibi for keeping things the way they are, for opposing any change or improvement” (2008, p. 31). In response to these concerns, and after a conversation with Kelchtermans (personal communication, 2015), I shifted my focus to fulfilment. Shifting to discussions of fulfilment and practising fiercely altered the discussions, tapping into people’s inner strength and passion for making a difference.

When people think about teacher commitment, they often consider commitment to the students, the school or their discipline. Day et al.’s (2005) findings “suggest that commitment to teaching goes beyond, and is deeper, than these. It involves a cluster of values, which, throughout the professional career, regardless of circumstance, are drivers of commitment” (p. 573). Discussions of fulfilment tapped into these drivers, and helped to untangle the unwavering dimensions of stance and supports that enabled specialist teachers to find meaning and fulfilment in their roles.

As will be discussed later, several participants left their roles during or shortly after the study. In discussing their reasons, several of them referenced the difficulty in sustaining stamina in roles misaligned with their stance. “One of the barriers is not believing in ... what you’re doing. I think if you don’t believe in something it makes it much harder” (Hannah, Pre-2014). Their struggles resonate with a study of burnout in secondary teachers conducted by Loonstra, Brouwers and Tomic (2009), which established the inverse correlation to existential fulfilment. Conceptualised as self-acceptance, self-actualisation and self-transcendence, fulfilment helped to buffer teachers from the “experience of meaninglessness” (p. 753) that led to burnout.

Practising fiercely (HOW)

Fulfilment was the *why* for this group of specialist teachers, and practising fiercely was the *how*. Practising fiercely grew out of conversations about wellbeing. In line with their perspectives on authentic practice, participants conceptualised wellbeing as having both inward-focusing and outward-focusing dimensions. In terms of the first dimension, they described wellbeing in conventional ways and valued a range of physical, social-emotional, cultural and spiritual aspects of being well. The second dimension is best introduced as practising fiercely, or doing well, with wellbeing as a by-product of a life well lived. Ultimately, practising fiercely was a more useful framework for considering fulfilment, as it drew out more expansive notions of wellbeing and combined *being* well with *doing* well (Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008).

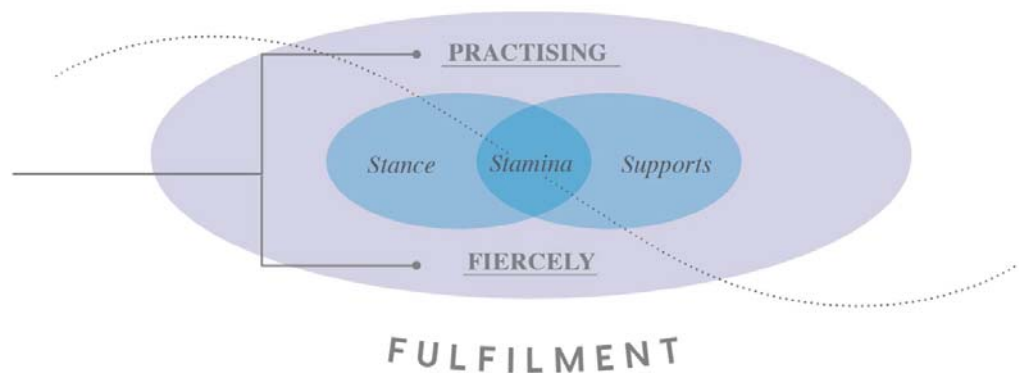


Figure 11. Practising fiercely

Practising fiercely as relational wellbeing

As noted earlier, the findings from the present study suggest that the ways specialist teachers construct the idea of wellbeing can serve as a barrier to their wellbeing. When participants framed wellbeing in idealistic and elusive ways, with a strong focus on the physical, they reported a sense of failure when comparing themselves to an

unachievable ideal. Wellbeing was often discussed in aspirational ways as a state participants sought to achieve but had not yet achieved.

I think that wellbeing is balance: feeling that things are in balance or are in sync. It is not a set of scales, but when the different parts of my life are in sync with each other. Then I feel well and I can sit down for an afternoon and read a book because that's what I want to do, not because I am feeling guilty because there are twenty million things that I should be doing. Next year I hope to make me the project a little bit, because I think I have pushed myself back. Everything else has come ahead of me, everything and everyone including my study, and I have lost myself this year. So wellness is when I am able to put myself, make me part of what I need to look after.

(Sam, Post-2014)

As discussed in Chapter 4, when asked about wellbeing, the conversation often narrowed to participants' physical wellbeing and focused on being unwell rather than well. Zena (Post-2014), Hannah (Post-2014) and Lola (Pre-2014) shared health scares; Belinda (Post-2014), Hannah (Pre-2014), Katie (Pre-2015) and Daphne (Pre-2015) described burnout in previous roles. Additionally, their answers were often apologetic, for instance confessing that they'd cancelled their gym membership (Mia, Post-2014), or gained weight during study (Sam, Post-2014; Friend, Post-2014).

I am not very satisfied with my own wellbeing. It is still the first thing [to go]. If you make a list – I have a list of things that I achieve in a day – if I have written *walk the dog*, if I have written *do yoga*, that is the one thing that goes first. It always goes first and I don't know how to prioritise my wellbeing. I haven't figured that out, why it is less important to me than the other things when it shouldn't be. I think some of it is accountability. I am not accountable to anybody but myself and I think we tend to achieve things where there is accountability, where there are deadlines, where the kids' homework has to be done. I still don't feel that I have got a good handle on wellbeing. (Sam, Post-2015)

During the interview with Mia (Post-2014) I decided to ask the question differently to get at the fuller picture of wellbeing, including that which I had come to think of as *practising fiercely*. I named this construct in response to ideas that seemed to be emerging in interviews and focus group discussions, and later confirmed the relevance of the construct with participants. The following conversation with Mia (Post-2014) exemplifies the narrower responses to a question focused on wellbeing, and the shifts in my own thinking as a response to reading, reflecting and talking with participants and other specialist teachers. Mia's response also demonstrates the more expansive nature of responses when wellbeing was reframed as practising fiercely.

Mia: My gosh, I have a confession: I wasn't very good with my wellbeing this year. It is because ... keeping up my caseload at work, then coming straight home and doing my study, then going to bed, that was my existence. I never got time to walk on the beach and I never got time to go, I actually cancelled my gym membership until after I finished my study and that was a whole five months of not going to the gym.

Wendy: I am going to shift the topic for a second, because I have asked each of you – you and the six I talked to before you – to tell me about a time when you felt a sense of wellbeing. And I noticed that four of the six said 'I don't have one'. And when I said the same to you, you also jumped to being unwell. ... What if wellbeing includes all of the self-care stuff, but it is also about having courageous conversations, difficult conversations, practising fiercely? Not taking the easy road and saying 'Oh, I will just give them teacher aide hours because they asked for them and I want them to like me' because ultimately that wouldn't make you feel very well. But fighting hard for what you know is right even though it's the hard road. That sort of wellbeing: being able to sleep well at night because you know you did a damn good job today for some kids. So if I describe it like that can you tell me when you felt well?

Without hesitation, Mia launched into a story of working with the mother of a young boy experiencing difficulties with learning. She recounted a

difficult conversation with the mother, that resulted in the mother seeking a medical intervention. For Mia, the example foregrounded her own risk-taking, how it lifted the mother's confidence and how she believed it would ultimately benefit the young boy.

Mia: 'Oh my god, this is just what the little boy needs'. So, inside my wellbeing felt really good because it was for his health. ... This is going to help immensely and so my wellbeing felt good that day.

Wendy: So that sort of wellbeing: you are driving home thinking 'Yes! It wasn't easy, but man it was worth it'. How would you describe that?

Mia: I guess it is kind of like a peace or a calm that comes over you when you know you have done really well for that child. It just feels good inside; it's like sunshine in your heart really, in your beating heart. This is probably why I am doing this job: the school was put at ease because they really didn't think the Mum was going to come through, the Mum was put at ease because something was being done for her child. ... I just get the vision of hands in the sunshine and all the hands together. ... They are all joined together with the sunshine behind them; just that feeling of sunshine on your hands, that warm feeling. (Post-2014)

Others later reinforced this fiercer notion of wellbeing as a byproduct of practice well practised (Friend, Post-2015). Hannah emphasised this point succinctly. "Wellbeing isn't always taking the easy choices, but it is taking the choices that feel right, that you believe to be right" (Post-2014). For participants, the construct of practising fiercely balanced relational wellbeing with a focus on their efforts.

Fighting the good fight

In the second phase of the study, our conversations shifted to stance and stamina, and participants considered fulfilment in relation to practising fiercely. Increasingly, they began to story their practices as 'fighting a good fight' (Belinda, Post-2014). They reported using what Collin et al. (2008) term "fight back strategies" which they viewed as necessary if not always comfortable. In particular, this group of specialist teachers

positioned themselves as actively fighting back against deficit discourses and unhelpful policies in education (Focus Group, 2015). Daphne hoped parents saw her as someone who would “go in and fight for them ... push for their best possible needs if necessary. Somebody needs to advocate for these children and support the families. I will go out of my way to support those families” (Pre-2015).

Seeing parents fighting hard for their children also motivated participants to fight the good fight as well.

Why do parents have to fight so hard? That is my biggest disillusion: ... why the hell do parents have to fight so hard for what they should be entitled to? It just seems unfair when so many other sectors in life are being handed stuff on a plate. But these guys, they don't have to fight once, they have to fight every time they join a new situation, every time they go to a new school, every time they need the taxis changed if they move house. ... I feel frustrated. I can just imagine, because for a parent they are not only living with that child everyday but they are also living with the system.
(Belinda, Post-2014)

The group of specialist teachers in the present study mentioned some discomfort with practising fiercely. Typically, their discomfort was with how they might be perceived by others; participants wanted to be seen as strong but not combative, fighting but not fighters. Belinda (Post-2014) talked about getting to know a specialist teacher from another part of the sector, as part of their joint work around a young person.

I got to know the [specialist teacher]; I got to know her on a more personal level. I had always found her to be quite obtrusive. But what I realised is she is just fighting the good fight. Which is probably how I am perceived by people, as being obtrusive too, because ‘Hang on a minute, that’s not right, we have got to do X, this is how we do it we do it properly.’ It was almost like I looked in the mirror and I am you. (Belinda, Post-2014)

Finella reconciled this discomfort by considering the fight as just one facet of her professional practice, and practising fiercely as comprised of both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’

practices. She discussed walking in two worlds, as Māori, and working in two worlds as a Māori professional. She spoke of 'shapeshifting' and shared a story of Tumatauenga, the Māori god of war to illustrate her point. Finella's example foregrounds the discernment needed to practise fiercely.

If you were to look at shapeshifting, Māori actually fought depending on the seasons. So if it was time to harvest, or if it was time to plant, that was a time of peace so they shapeshifted into farmers, cultivators, husbands. ... But then during times of war, they have to shape shift into warriors. That serves two purposes: they are warriors and fighters in order to be the protectors. [In] the Māori world there is always duality, and I suppose that's why I talk about the notion of shape shifting. (Finella, Post-2015)

She related this to her own life – discussing the times when she was a mother, sister and daughter, and also the ways she shifted from learner to teacher, and from educator to mentor. In her practice, these ideas helped Finella to decide when to go with the flow and when to stand up for something. As one illustration of this, because Finella viewed children as inseparable from the family unit, she saw her work as a specialist teacher as supporting children and families/whānau in the first instance. Her practice was aligned with these beliefs: when she received a new referral, she met with the whānau in their home before meeting with the school. Standard practice in her team was to make contact with the school first; still, Finella contacted the parents first because "they knew their child better than anybody else. ... Depending on how long that teacher has had that child ... it might only be for a couple of months ... the relationship with the teacher is almost secondary" (Finella, Post-2015). She clarified her belief that teachers are an essential part of the intervention, "but at the end of the day the child still has to go home" (Finella, Post-2015). These examples illustrate the soft and hard dimensions of practising fiercely, an approach that is based on discerning where to expend one's energies in order to make the most difference for diverse learners.

Stance (WHAT)

Stance encompasses professional identities and self-understandings, enacted in participants' genuine and enacted practices as they continually (re)construct themselves in their interactions with others across contexts.

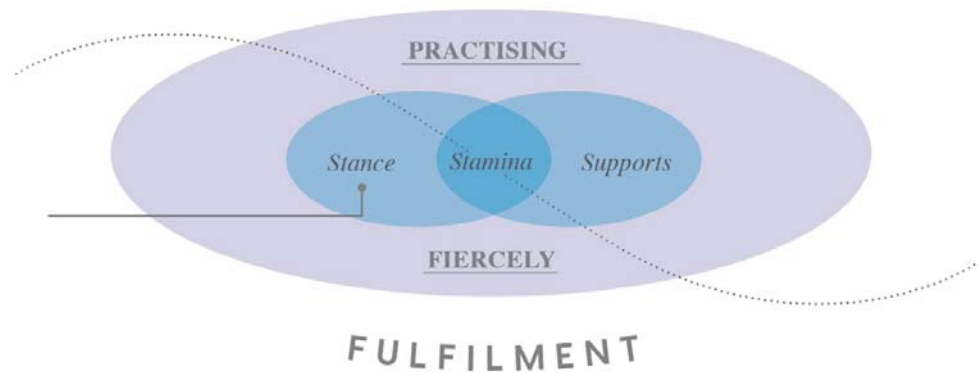


Figure 12. Stance

Participants in the present study conceptualised fulfilment as mediated through practising fiercely which is comprised of stance, supports and stamina. For this group of teachers, stance is enacted professional identity, or learning who we are as we act on the environment. They viewed stance as a more dynamic and relational construct than professional identity, connoting the reciprocal influence of others on our evolving self-understandings. Stance, interconnected with supports and stamina, fits with Glynn's notion of a community of practice. "Identity and practice are mirror images of each other. What we do, what we engage in, and the range of communities of practice in which we can fully participate all define who we are" (2016, p. 171). Participants noted strong correlations between their stance and their stamina, as how they see themselves influences the chances they take, and the way they interpret success, challenge and setbacks.

Returning to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework, practice can be viewed as an interaction between teachers and the layers of their ecology (1979). However, in their review of articles purportedly based on Bronfenbrenner's framework, Tudge et al. argue all but four articles were formulated on outmoded understandings of his model; as such, they focused almost exclusively on the contextual influences on individuals (Tudge et al, 2009). Many of the tensions presented by participants in this study mirror this imbalanced interpretation of ecological systems theory, whereby context is privileged over individual agency. These include prescriptive policies designed to produce consistent, high-quality performance irrespective of the specific professional; ongoing professional development focused on skill development over self-understanding and agency, and professional standards that minimise the relevance and power of the individual professional. At the heart of each is the unspoken assumption that 'best practice' can and should be automated and codified from the outside (Kelchtermans, 2015).

Viewed this way, professional service standards can be seen as 'locking down' practice, pushing identities, lived experiences and responsiveness to the periphery of what specialist teachers do. *Stance* invokes later iterations of Bronfenbrenner's framework, re-establishing the individual professional at the centre of their practice as the person best equipped to make sense of multi-sourced evidence and its relevance to the current situation. As such, this group of specialist teachers interpreted policy, and developed and drew on their own professional wisdom in order to co-construct the most appropriate way forward in a given situation. *Stance* reignites the individual actor with the power to co-create the layers within their ecosystems, determine their actions within their layers, and to mediate the reciprocal influence of each layer. Considering the perspectives of the participants in the present study, *stance* potentially re-situates specialist teachers, individually and as a collective, as active agents within the broader education and sociopolitical context.

Bronfenbrenner asserts that individuals always influence their environment, but can do so in more and less active ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, 2005; Tudge et al., 2009). In the most passive sense, a person alters the environment simply by their presence. More active influence might involve individuals using their personal resources in ways

that bring about change. Lastly, most active, “the extent to which the person changes the environment is linked, in part, to the desire and drive to do so, or force characteristics” (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 201). *Stance* foregrounds these *force characteristics* as a critical aspect of professional practice.

Focused inward: Who participants understood themselves to be

Stance as a deeper, more integrated, self-understanding

The semi-structured interviews contained a mixture of old and new questions. Several questions were kept the same over the two years, as I wanted to explore the changes in people’s answers as a reflection of their growth over time. The first of the perennial questions, was “How do you describe yourself personally and professionally?” Rather than separating out the personal and professional, I wanted to explore the connections between these two aspects of self, to explore the ways they were separated, integrated and weighted differently over time.

In the first few rounds of interviews, personal and professional self-descriptions tended to be more formal and formulaic, for instance listing family members, job titles and other common descriptors of self. The responses in the final interviews were consistently deeper, getting at the *who* of the person across all of their identities, and indicated growing trust as well as their strengthened professional identity. Belinda’s replies in her first then last interviews exemplify this:

Personally, I am a Mum. I have four children. ... I’ve been teaching for just over 20 years. I started off in the primary sector, so I worked in primary most of my career and seven years ago I moved to secondary. (Pre-2014)

I still have four kids ... but I have got a change in job so I am still working at the same school but I have been appointed Dean so that is a pastoral care role. Having worked in senior management before, it wasn’t a pastoral care role, I burnt myself out. I am extremely glad to be doing the pastoral stuff, actually helping kids and encouraging them, being realistic rather than mollycoddling them, actually making them take responsibility for themselves and the decisions they are making. ... If I had to tell someone

what I did [for a living] it would be that I work as an advocate for kids to make sure that they have adequate access to all areas of the school. (Post-2015)

Sam, in her final interview, synthesised her growth and also her integration of the personal and professional.

I think in both cases I still see myself as a connector. Somebody who helps people make connections, helps my students connect with their learning, connect with each other. And I think I am the same personally: helping people connect with themselves, helping them connect. ... I think I have improved as a listener over the last few years, and being that mindful listener – being present in the moment – I have been developing as a skill and I think I am getting better both professionally and personally. (Post-2015)

Over time, as participants developed their stance, they were able to link to what originally drew them to the field, and the unique contribution they wanted to make. For Lola (Pre-2014), for example, it was about “opening up the world and giving kids different perspectives to look at things from”. Coming from a small town herself, she helped students to “experience different things, outside of [their] little community. ... My drive is to show them what’s out there”. When they start to “see possibility ... that’s what keeps me going” (Lola, Pre-2014).

For Mia and others it was their strong belief that “you can teach others. That’s why I became a teacher, so I can teach others and make life easier” (Pre-2014). Seeing the results of their original mission years later affirmed specialist teachers’ stance (Focus Group, 2015). Mia (Pre-2014) reflected on a student who came back years later to say, “Miss, I remember what you said to me. ... You made us learn, you told us why we were learning and you made us learn, and it’s made a difference.” For Mia, this acknowledgement validated that she had become who she had hoped to become as a teacher. “It’s amazing. They do describe me that way. I did make a difference to them” (Pre-2014).

Stance as genuine

For Belinda and others, stance was predicated on being genuine; it was where their espoused theory met their actual practice (Argyris and Schön, 1974). In this way, stance encapsulated professional identity and authentic practice as discussed in Chapter 4. Belinda's summary – “who I think I am and what the people think I am” (Post-2015) – fits well with Glynn's assertion that “practice and identity are mirror images: how we do things is who we are” (Glynn, 2015, p. 175). Friend echoed the importance of authenticity in one's stance, although she and others preferred the term ‘genuineness’ (Focus Group, 2015).

Our genuineness in the way that we approach something. If I think about a child that I'm working with, I'm genuine in my willingness to do the best thing for her, wanting to have the best outcomes, wanting to support the family, doing whatever it takes and knowing that all those things are in there: my beliefs, my integrity, my values, those are all the things that are going to come through. ... If you don't have that [genuineness] as part of your stance, how can other people really support you? How can you really support others? (Focus Group, 2015)

Framing their stance as genuine, rather than authentic, appealed to participants. They saw the *authentic* as connoting perfection; thus it was not always realistic enough to be helpful. *Genuine*, for them, was a way of being they could bring to every interaction, irrespective of the circumstances and constraints on their practice. Participants talked about extending this genuine acceptance to others as well. Mia, for example, worked to lift the whole of each teacher she worked with in the same non-judgemental way: “Just accepting other teachers for who they are as well and valuing what they bring to the table. ... I think that's really important: everyone should be valued for who they are and their strengths” (Mia, Pre-2014). For themselves and others, their take on genuine practice fits with Palmer's emphasis on authenticity as more about being whole than being perfect (2009).

Their ideas around genuineness as a key component of stance all fed into participants' hope for inside-outside coherence as people and as professionals. Belinda noted that

when a person's stance is genuine, and embodied in their actions, the words used by others to describe them should mirror the words the person themselves would use (Post-2015). "What would be the key adjectives I would want people to say about me? If I lay down on the ground and they drew around my body, what would I want them to write about me?" (Belinda, Post-2015).

Focused outward: How participants enacted their self-understanding

Stance as connectedness

Consistent with other relational ways of knowing, specialist teachers in the present study thought of stance in terms of its connections to their past and future, and the people with whom they worked. Finella revisited her temporal connections as a way to embolden her stance.

Māori will always acknowledge origins ... right back to the story of Creation. In doing that, you also begin to acknowledge every living thing around you and how it resonates with you in order to strengthen you, to provide you with *ora*. ... You remember where you came from and how you came to be. And then it also reminds you that you are never alone ... so that's what propels you forward. It gives you the *kaha* to look at the unknown. ... And because thought actually gives energy to something, you then go forward, so that's your stance. (Finella, Post-2015)

Others invoked their connections to others as fundamental to their stance (Focus Group, 2015). Kirsten, for example, formed and shared her values in her interactions with others, and thus saw relationships as critical for enacting her stance. "Without genuine relationships, ... a lot of those other aspects fall apart. ... You said about values, which is personal – but what we share of our values is the relationship aspect. If we don't have relationships we don't have anything" (Kirsten, Focus Group, 2015).

An essential consideration of stance, in terms of connectedness, was the extent to which each person remained connected to enduring aspects of self, while co-creating other aspects with others in the moment and in context. Sam unpacked what she saw as the balance between aspects of self that remain constant and the aspects that are

co-created within an interaction, or the 'bit of me, bit of we' that continues to evolve her stance. During the focus group, she placed a leaf on which she'd written "perception of others" on the Stance Ketso. "Perception of others – how other people see me does influence my stance as well. Sometimes I have to reframe what I'm doing because I realise I'm not being perceived the way I think I'm being, or I want to be (Focus Group, 2015).

Stance as physical and dynamic

Stance was a much more physical construct for participants; they viewed it as the enactment and embodiment of their professional philosophies and professional identity. In contrast to the ways they had earlier framed their professional identity, participants used active and physical words to describe their stance. Sam (Post-2015) for example, said, "Stance for me is where you plant your feet and how you set up your store, in whatever role you are in." Belinda spoke of needing to find her feet in her new role, in an almost literal sense.

Once I know [where I stand], I will stand very firmly with that and I won't sway in the sense that I will often hear myself saying 'I strongly believe'. I am not afraid of people sitting in roles above me, [not afraid] to fight the good fight. (Belinda, Post-2014)

Following on from her assertion that stance is relational, co-created in the interaction, Sam discussed stance in ways that invoked its physicality. She summarised stance as "stubborn, but not inflexible" (Sam, Post-2015):

[Stance is] probably what grounds me, but ... I have learnt that quite often I need to reposition my feet and to not be rigid in my stance. You have got to be flexible. You have got to have the confidence to be strong in what you believe, while being flexible to the things around you. Might have to bend and adapt without adapting who you are. Or if you are going to [adapt who you are], it is a considered decision; it is not a reactive one to circumstances. You have actually learnt something and re-evaluated and deliberately changed your stance. (Sam, Post-2015)

Finella's construction of stance was also physical, referring back to the walls of Durie's Te Whare Tapa Wha (1985) framework.

When I look at what we've come up with around Stance, it almost immediately makes me think of Te Whare Tapa Wha. Because look, we've got Taha Whānau, Taha Wairua, Taha Hinengaro and Taha Tinana. And when you acknowledge each of those four states, which when you think about it as ecological as well, you have the whole person. (Finella, Focus Group, 2015)

Finella pulled together the groups' ideas of stance in the Māori greeting "tatau tatau", which acknowledges that we are all here, and all in this together (Focus Group, 2015).

The constructs of *stance* and *stamina* originated from Kelchtermans' (2008) discussion on the professional lives of teachers. Kelchtermans unpacks stance as the moral and political aspects of belonging, where we make clear what we believe in, where we stand, and whose side we are on. He references Bullough (2005) in asserting "to be a teacher is to stand for something, for a particular idea of what a good life is" (p. 28). Aotearoa New Zealand research concurs, asserting the importance of specialist teachers first knowing themselves – including their cultures, worldviews, identities and biases – before they can work effectively with and make a difference for Māori (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013).

In the present study, specialist teachers conceptualised stance as the stable aspects of self they brought to every interaction combined with the fluid elements they co-constructed with others. In this way, stance was balanced between looking inward and acting outward, and composed of both enduring and dynamic qualities. These findings reinforce Kelchtermans' original ideas around the importance of self-study, self-understanding, and reciprocal learning through our actions and interactions (2008).

Participants' view of stance as relational, only powerful to the extent it empowered others, fits well with Edwards' (2005) concept of relational agency. Described as an "enhanced version of personal agency" (p. 172) relational agency enables purposeful practice in which professionals align thoughts and actions, to collectively interpret and

respond to practise situations (Edwards, 2005). The daily debriefs Ruth and her interprofessional team established are a tangible example of this: the small group collaboratively reflected on their successes and failures each day in order to create an internal climate of lifelong learning, calibrate their practices and continually improve their services to children and families/whānau. In spite of the difficulties inherent in publicly critiquing one another's practice, her team deeply valued the process.

So, that ability to bounce ideas off each other and to share and to critique each other, I think that's really important and we value that. It's a safe enough space that you can do that. Everybody welcomes feedback. Not always, of course. I think one of the things is that we teach with heads and hearts and there's a swing [between the two]. I've had people say it's not professional – you can't love the children and families – but actually you do. If you're in early childhood and you don't have an emotion, I think there's something missing. That mixture of head and hearts means that often people do get a bit upset. We're working really hard in the team and it's not ever easy. We have all agreed, we don't always like it but we've all agreed, that we share all of the time. It's not always easy and it doesn't work always and it's a tension sometimes, but we all do value it. (Ruth, 2014)

There are also synergies between the present study and David's (2016) recent work around emotional agility, in which she describes values as ongoing, freely chosen and freeing for the individual, active, guiding and fostering self-acceptance. Like stance, David's conceptualisation of values emphasises the dynamic ways self-understanding helps professionals to "place [their] feet in the right direction" (p. 121), especially at what she terms *choice points* in their days and in their lives. For Belinda, a discrete example of this was structuring home-school collaboration in ways that kept the parents closely involved, even though this is less common in secondary school, because she believed in the importance of the student-teacher-parent triad. The importance of seeing practice tensions as choice points will be further explored in Chapter 7.

Supports (WHAT)

Participants viewed supports as the internal and external elements which support our stance, stamina and fulfilment (Focus Group, 2015). For them, support was given and received at each layer of the environment in active, relational and collective ways.

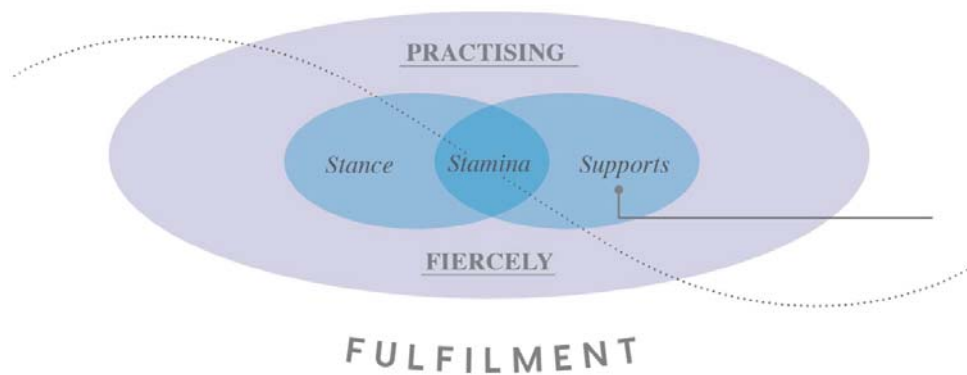


Figure 13. Supports

The supports this group of specialist teachers identified are best explored in the concentric layers of their ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). At the innermost layer, participants spoke of internal characteristics such as faith, self-efficacy and perseverance. For the majority of participants, this was not a natural layer to consider; they were more likely to identify supports from others than to attribute their success to something within-person. One layer out, they considered the reciprocal support of people across within and across their microsystems. In a relational take on support, participants valued giving as much as receiving support and were able to articulate the ways each had fortified their practice. Lastly, examining their mesosystems and exosystems, they identified the supports provided by office and team cultures and climates, systems and structures. As with every ecosystem, there was much interplay within and between the layers, and it was important to position each participant as an

active agent in their ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) with the ability to map their networks of support.

In considering supports, there was the continual dance between the interindividual and the intraindividual. “It’s important to have alone time to just sit in a quiet space. ... But in terms of stamina ... it’s important to have support, ... that sense of knowing that there is somebody there on the same journey to move you along (Finella, Post-2015). Katie’s summary of her supports provides a good example of the integration of supports. She wove together her own passion, timely reminders from her support people, and her support of others. Katie identified her supports as “the heart of ... what keeps you going. ... The relationships, and what my husband reminds me of: that I am making a difference for those kids. That’s really close to my heart; I want to do something that I’m passionate about. That’s where the supports come in” (Post-2015).

Te Ao Māori values collective ways of doing, being and knowing, whereas dominant Western discourses can marginalise the collective in favour of the individual (Glynn, 2015). Finella articulated the essential nature of support the most strongly. “You are not alone. Māori know that: if you’re alone, you’re probably going to die. That whole whānau concept ... is about survival” (Finella, Post-2015). Mia also discussed the ways she intentionally enacted her collective values in her practice. “Modelling the way that Māori work – we like to work collaboratively – ... so I never offer to do things unless I have got somebody with me” (Post-2015).

So ingrained are collective and relational ideas that, when asked to identify their supports, Māori and non-Māori participants were just as likely to reflect on giving support as they were to consider the support given to them (Focus Group, 2015). Mia viewed her study as a collective activity; when asked who supports her study, she talked about actively bringing other people into her journey and using her learning to lift others. “I’m talking to my colleagues and involving them in my practicum. ... What I’m trying to do is bring back what I’ve learnt to the table ... bringing in research. ... I’m giving them a lot of different articles to read, that I’ve learned from, and the main points that I’ve learnt from” (Mia, Pre-2014).

Participants' internal characteristics

As mentioned earlier, Bronfenbrenner identified three types of internal characteristics, which he termed demand, resource, and force characteristics (Tudge et al., 2009).

Demand characteristics include aspects of physical appearance, such as age, gender and skin colour. Resource characteristics require more effort to understand, such as skills, intelligence and material resources. The present study focused particularly on the final type, force characteristics, which can include grit, temperament and other characteristics that can significantly influence an individual's professional journey.

There were considerable overlaps between stance and supports, naturally, as many positive characteristics were both facets of specialist teachers' selves and ways they intentionally approached their personal and professional lives. These characteristics were less about specific behaviour and more about claiming an identity. Rather than naming their actions, they tended to identify themselves as the type of people who engaged in those actions, characterising themselves as professionals who were stubborn, rebellious and fierce (Focus Group, 2015).

Several participants cited their ability to prioritise, and to identify the non-negotiables in their lives. Invariably, they considered themselves 'the kind of person who' puts family first. Kirsten, for example, was determined that her study would not come at the cost of her family. "My family is my drive to keep going, but they are also my drive to stop" (Pre-2015). She talked about the tensions that inevitably arise in parenting alongside study: "When they are stressed ... my priority is to them. If I am in the middle of an assignment ... I would rather not finish it if it meant my children were unsupported" (Pre-2015). After completing her study, Kirsten reflected on the ways she had balanced her family's needs with her coursework. "I would never want my family to think I put anything ... before them. I think I have achieved that" (Post-2015).

Several participants cited their faith but in nuanced ways. For Bella, it was her strong Christian beliefs that influenced her practice and allowed her to trust that things would work out (Pre-2014). Friend, spiritual but not religious, also spoke of her faith that her work would benefit someone, somewhere, and that this belief was enough to keep her going (Pre-2014). Hannah had a "there but by the grace of God" connection to every person and every family with whom she worked. Her ability to imagine points in her

own life when she might have ended up the very same way supported her in suspending judgment, and being grateful for an opportunity to serve others (Post-2015).

Over time, participants reported increased confidence in their own gut instincts and professional wisdom; in their access to the theory/evidence-base and the systems they created to organise their lives, and in the impact they were having on the lives of children, families and whānau. Their increased confidence in themselves and their decision-making became an internal source of support for them as well (Focus Group, 2015). Sam drew on her sheer determination; having survived other difficult times, she had the belief that she would be able to come through the current difficult time as well (Sam, Pre-2014). Katie and others noted the personal characteristics that served them well, such as being “a really positive person and that no matter what I will just keep going” (Katie, Post-2015). Hannah also talked about having “a certain amount of self-belief” (Pre-2014). She noted that some of this has come with age. “When you’re younger, you’re much more concerned about what other people think. And now I’ve got to the stage where I’m actually really more concerned about what I think.” Having observed high school students the day before, she reflected on the pressure to fit in at certain ages and stages. Happily, she added, “If you’re lucky and you have support throughout your life then you can get to a stage where you can believe what you think is important, too” (Hannah, Pre-2014).

Participants expressed confidence in their knowledge of theory and research (Sam, Post-2015; Ruth, Post-2015) and the ways this has fortified their practice. “If I’ve got some evidence-based research behind me about what I’m thinking ... it makes me feel a bit stronger to have those conversations” (Mia, Pre-2015). They also developed systems that reflected “who I have become ... how I get to the point that I feel like, okay, I have finished for the day” (Belinda, Post-2015). Belinda, for example, used her diary as a way to organise herself “so that I’m doing the best for the kids, the best for the staff ... and for the parents.” Because for her, “there is that triangulation between the three, every single day I divide my diary up into three sections.” In terms of her own wellbeing and stamina, Belinda carves out tangible space for herself in her diary. “What do I have to do for myself? That’s always at the top of the page” (Post-2015).

Most important, participants had confidence in “what I do and the difference that it makes” (Friend, Post-2015). In a way, these three facets of confidence mirror the three circles of evidence: they knew and trusted the research, their own wisdom and their impact in relation to clients, (Bourke et al., 2005). The way this group of specialist teachers framed their ongoing learning and development, in terms of the three circles of evidence, will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

Other people as supports

Participants had networks of support that ranged from formal to informal, and time-limited to long-term. Support came from friends and family; colleagues and peers; mentors; and former students. “I am a firm believer that if I work on my own, I only have my perspective. If I work in a group, I have a big perspective” (Kirsten, Pre-2015).

Flores and Day (2006) note the importance of teachers having a strong commitment to the profession, but also that they recognise the influence various teachers in various forms have had on their own life, and how these ‘significant others’ (p. 225) have contributed to their self-understanding of the role of a teacher. Mia reflected on the extent to which she learned her role through her interactions with other teachers and specialist teachers: “What inspires me is other teachers, what their journeys have been like in education and how they deal with things” (Pre-2014). This was especially important in her new role. “I’ll think of doing something and then ... I’ll talk to someone about it. ... I don’t have that experience to draw on ... so having them mentor me through those challenging situations is just amazing” (Mia, Pre-2014). Participants included children with whom they had worked as key ‘significant others’ in their support network. Zena was supported in seeing students years later and finding “that they’re doing well, that they’re happy, that they can still have a conversation with you as their ex-teacher and that there is still a relationship there” (Pre-2014).

Mia credited her stamina to “the support from my whānau but also from my colleagues and their absolute belief in me. ... If people believe in you, it gives you that momentum to keep going” (Mia, Pre-2014). Working formally or informally with others was mentioned by several participants as a necessary component of their practice, allowing them “to step back and think about my steps before I make them.” (Mia, Pre-

2014). Sam framed conversations with peers as having “reflective practice with another voice, so that you are not just playing it in your head: ‘I should’ve done this, I should’ve done this’. You’ve actually got someone to say, ‘This is what happened, what do you think, what can work and what can I do?’” (Sam, Pre-2014).

Support from colleagues affirmed the person; “It’s okay to be who you are as well, and bring that in as well” (Mia, Pre-2014). It also enhanced their practice, and showed them sides of themselves they hadn’t seen. As illustrated in Mia’s statements in Chapter 4, feedback from a peer mentor helped her to see herself “in a different mirror” (Pre-2014).

Participants created their networks and tried to take charge of their support, identifying their needs before identifying who might be of support to them (Focus Group, 2015). Belinda, for example, consistently reflected on what she needed and where she might get it before accessing her network. She talked through her process, noting that “for me, my supports are very, very selective” (Belinda, Post-2015). “In my workplace I have ... a few people that I trust, that I go and seek advice from, and they are ... quite diverse.” She talked about one colleague who was brutally honest: “Sometimes I think, no, I really need to know” so she went to this colleague; “other times ... you ask someone different because they will tell you what you want to hear kind of thing”. Belinda chose not to discuss practice or study with her husband, “because I don’t actually want my husband to fix it or solve it. All I want him to do is listen to me ramble on, and then say nothing, but that isn’t necessarily what men do”. Outside of work, she identified “different people that fill my vessel about different things” as well as the times she could be “quite insular and I will just rely on myself. ... I will go out for a walk and I will be thinking about all this stuff, and it’s almost as if I have had a conversation with someone” (Belinda, Post-2015).

Katie was also confident in her ability to draw on her supports and mapped a range of support inside and outside of her workplace. “I draw on my networks. I am really good at doing that ... drawing on the people that I know or that I feel quite confident that I can trust and that will support me” (Post-2015). Later, Katie added, “One of my biggest strengths [is] I know who to go to and how to get that support” (Post-2015). As

mentioned earlier, Ruth co-created a formal support system for her entire team by way of a daily debrief alongside naturally occurring discussions throughout the day. She built on the current strengths of the team – “we have some really experienced people in the team, so there are people to bounce ideas off” – and formalised the space and place of that support. Creating an “evaluation time at the end of the day [provided] a chance to talk about what’s happened, what we’ve tried. ... That ability ... to share and to critique each other, I think that’s really important and we value that” (Ruth, Pre-2014).

Supporting others

Sociocultural messages about learning prompt educators to foreground the holistic wellbeing of the group alongside the group’s more tacit goals and agendas (Glynn, 2015). “Without appropriately addressing the first goal, achieving the second may be disrupted, or derailed and not achieved at all” (Glynn, 2015, p. 175). Consistent with this position, participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of supporting others. Doing so reinforced their identities, helping them to story themselves as ‘I am the type of person who...’ supports others, and also generated the reciprocal benefit of getting from giving. “Learning inspires me, teaching and learning, so, ako. Learning from others and just that joy knowing that you’re facilitating that learning process keeps me going” (Ruth, Pre-2014).

As with the other specialist teachers in the present study, Mia viewed supporting others as a critical part of her professional identity. “I love to nurture and mentor. ... I love to be in that supportive, tautoko role supporting others” (Mia, Post-2015). Specifically, she viewed herself as the ‘wellbeing person’ in her office.

One of my colleagues ... dropped down this week. ... She just sat there and went, ‘I don’t know what I meant to be doing.’ ... She usually would. She said, ‘I’m standing here looking at the ... resources and I just can’t remember what I meant to be doing.’ I said, ‘You’re meant to be looking after your wellbeing. In fact, you should be at home.’ I say that to everybody. I’m very open and say, ‘If you’re sick, you go home. Wellbeing.’

I always say that to them so they know I am a wellbeing person. (Mia, Pre-2014)

Like other participants, Mia had a strong sense of self-efficacy in supporting others, and an enduring belief that specialist teachers could make a difference to the education system. She had confidence in her own ability and confidence that her work would lead to improved outcomes (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998, in Takahashi, 2011). Mia's perspective exemplifies collective self-efficacy as well, which can be understood as the commonly-held perceptions of the potential influence of the group, in this case the specialist teaching workforce (Bandura 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2004, in Takahashi, 2011).

Participants did not see supporting others as a task, but as a way of being both inside and outside of their professional roles. Ruth talked about caring for an elderly aunt. "Although it's hard being the main caregiver for Auntie, I have a responsibility and feel a sense of responsibility. There's also a sense of wellbeing from being in that caring role" (Pre-2014). Mia and her university-aged son studied together at the kitchen table most nights; she saw this as modelling lifelong learning for her son and as her primary "motivation to finish my post-grad, when I see my son [succeeding at university]." She went on to say, "We study together at midnight sometimes! That is my motivation, when I see my son coming home with really great marks and he's so proud of himself and I am, too. ... That's my legacy, really" (Mia, Pre-2014).

Supporting others helped them to leave their stamp on the education system, fulfilling their missions and forecasting the results of their impact. Looking back on her career, Ruth (Pre-2014) believed she would be most proud "of mentoring other people in the team, and hopefully building the centre as an innovative place where information is shared. ... So a place where people feel at home, where they can see practice happening in a real way" (Ruth, Pre-2014).

Cultures of support

Participants shared examples and non-examples of workplace support. Belinda (Pre-2014) described her positive culture as one where "my professional judgment was

trusted and my professionalism was trusted”. Additionally, she felt she “could make important decisions for myself and no one was ever actually going to question me about that.” As mentioned earlier, Ruth identified the daily debriefs she and her colleagues made time for, and Mia identified her team leader as a catalyst of her growth.

She is part of my blossoming and my growth. ... If she didn't let me express myself and have discussions with her, I wouldn't have grown as much. ... She has embraced me but let me grow out and around everybody and surround everybody in my team with my aroha because she knows I'm very much that. (Pre-2014)

Mia contrasted the difference, even within the same office, that leadership can make. At the focus group (2015) she put down a Ketso leaf on which she'd written “Voice not heard”. Mia expanded on this sentiment, noting the ways she was treated in two different teams and how that influenced her practice and self-confidence.

I've had experience in one of my teams of not having a voice at all. Everything was advocated for me, without me even being asked or collaborated with. But that changed when I changed teams, because the [previous manager] had seen me as a worker in the first instance and never gave me a voice where my second manager looked at me as a whole person and gave me a voice and permission to use it. The voice not heard has huge implications on your practice – you lose confidence in yourself, and lose yourself and just don't speak, you just close up. (Mia, Focus Group, 2015)

Kirsten (Post-2015), who had also switched teams recently, echoed the difference a culture of support can make. “I feel safe to ask for help; I feel safe to say I don't know. I feel safe to say, ‘I have only been in this job a few months, can you advise me?’”. In contrast to other places she has worked, “it's okay to make a mistake – there's a general acceptance that we are human and we can make mistakes.” She contrasted this with her former workplace, where she didn't feel able to “just be human and to show your weaknesses” (Kirsten, Post-2015). Daphne said this was modelled by the

leadership team at her work: “I just had an appraisal. ... My practice leader [is] ... very happy for you to go and say ‘I stuffed up and I’ve done this wrong’. ‘Hey, we all do it’. Or, ‘I’ve got a problem – what can we do about it?’” (Daphne, Post-2015).

Consistent with sociocultural perspectives, participants were bolstered by interactions with others in which they gave and received support. They articulated support at each layer of the ecology, from force characteristics (Tudge et al., 2009) to support from others in their micro- and exo-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). True to the research on becoming and belong as part of one’s communities of practice (Wenger, 2000), participants identified themselves as the kind of person who engaged in certain behaviours as a way of embodying a certain type of teacher.

Stamina (WHAT)

For the participants in this study, stamina connoted their long-term ability to practise fiercely, in ways that positioned them as culturally situated and genuine professionals contributing in responsive ways to the others in their contexts. Stamina requires a balance of teacher resilience and resistance as a way of maintaining wellbeing, both by prioritising one’s efforts and by practising in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling.

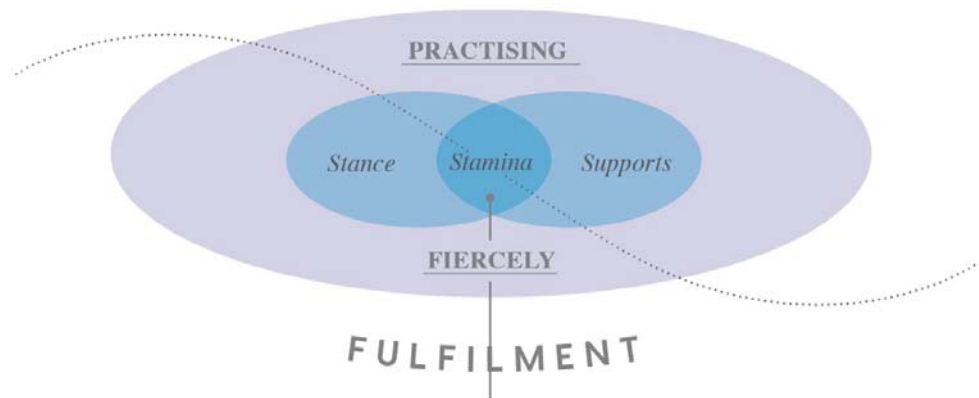


Figure 14. Stamina

As noted in the methodology section, participants in the present study collectively experienced a range of short- and long-term threats to their wellbeing, and many of these stressors occurred alongside the research. The majority of participants were in

new professional roles, which was often what had triggered the return to postgraduate study. For nine of the participants, the study was compulsory whether or not the timing fitted with other priorities in their lives. Seven of the participants had switched jobs immediately prior to joining this research, and four participants changed jobs again during the study. Three had multiple major surgeries during the two years we worked together. These challenges fortified participants' sensitivity and commitment to stamina.

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model considers the *process* of reciprocal interactions between the *person* and their *context* over *time*. In the present study, over time, and with everything in constant flux, participants continually recreated and responded to the layers of each dynamic ecosystem. Their narratives conveyed an understanding that there will always be tensions, and that specialist teachers will always be slightly different than the last time they navigated this tension. As a case in point, Hannah was able to fight some funding battles because her caseload was lighter at the time and her family's wellbeing was intact. A year later, confronting a health scare, she might not have had the time and energy.

Additionally, teachers will always get slightly different responses from the ecology, winning some funding battles while losing others. Across their careers, every specialist teacher is likely to experience times of diminished stance or fulfilment, and varying levels of support. Stamina allows them to zoom out from these experiences, consider the bigger picture of their situation, and fortify themselves in ways that intentionally rebuild their stance, fulfilment and supports.

Bronfenbrenner's framework is useful in considering what changes and what stays the same over time (Tudge et al., 2009) and how professionals stay the course, or 'strike the balance' between what is changing and unchanging (Delors, 2013, p. 320). Whilst micro-time aligns with *stance*, and the chronosystem contextualises *stance*, meso-time depicts *stamina*. Zooming out from any one interaction with others, positive or negative outcome, and so on, stamina is the longer-term ability to enact one's professional beliefs. Stamina is life-long learning, the continual dance between comfort and disruption that keeps practice fresh, challenging and moving forward. As

will be unpacked further in Chapter 7 professionals found their own combination of resilience and resistance in order to sustain their stamina. Their stamina, in turn, supported their continued ability to be resilient and resistant.

Stamina as intentional in their lives

Participants learned from personal and professional challenges, including significant mental and physical health issues, in ways that transformed their lives. Common across participants, periods of being unwell increased their intentionality around wellbeing and stamina. Lola, for instance, received a mental health diagnosis just prior to this research. She reflected on the ways being unwell influenced her focus on wellbeing, which had flow on effects to her stamina:

I hadn't even thought about [stamina] until last year when things just fell to pieces for me. I always thought you just chugged through life. I knew that certain things make you happy, like hanging out with friends, but I'd never really examined them as being parts of wellness that all need to be in balance. ... When things didn't go right last year, I really did have to sit back and examine, 'Okay, what do I need?' 'How do I get it?' I look at it now, but I never did before. ...

Without the [diagnosis], I don't think I could've actually got to this wellness point. Even if I'd sat down and someone said, 'Examine your aspects [of your wellbeing],' I don't think I would've given them the correct value or worth. If they were saying, 'Friends are important, you need to hang out with your friends,' I would be like, yeah, that's kind of important but it's not the be all and end all. ... Without that label I would never have got there. I needed the wake-up call. (Lola, Pre-2014)

As they conceptualised stamina as nimble and intentional, each participant planned for stamina in their role, and revisited their plan as necessary. The specifics of the plan were less important than the fact that they had one. Knowing this, and giving themselves permission to find what worked best for them alone, supported them in bolstering their long-term stamina.

One striking way participants' plans varied was in the extent they sought to integrate, or compartmentalise, their lives. Those who worked to integrate areas of their lives, studied at the kitchen table with their children (Mia, Post-2014; Kirsten, Pre-2015; Friend, Pre-2015) and valued conversations about practice with their partners (Hannah, Post-2014; Kirsten, Post-2015). Others sought to compartmentalise their lives as a way to sustain their stamina; Belinda kept work separate by limiting work-related discussions and not doing work at home.

Hannah, who valued work-life integration, described a time where her stamina was the strongest as "more balanced and everything came together, whereas before it had been very, very skewed towards some things" (Pre-2014). Her stamina was preserved by this balance, which allowed her to ride the highs and lows of her practice. "Even though I was teaching a very, very difficult class in a curriculum I'd never taught before ... it didn't seem too hard because of the balance of everything else" (Pre-2014).

Others found that compartmentalising tasks, relationships and roles better protected time and priorities (Focus Group, 2015). "Even when things are a bit more manic for me ... I'm a complete professional and no one would ever know that I've been up since half past four or that type of thing" (Belinda, Pre-2014). Belinda had integrated her work with her life, especially her social life, in a previous role, but found this stressful and invasive.

In my previous job, everybody knew everything about everybody. In my new job I chose not to be like that. I chose to keep my personal life to myself and people knew the basics about me but they weren't my social world and I think that that made a big difference as well. ... I made a really conscious choice when I changed jobs not to have that social aspect with staff. And that's more because I decided that I wanted to spend that time with my family or on myself. (Belinda, Pre-2014)

Belinda joked that compartmentalising allowed her to bring her best self to each space, irrespective of any difficulties she might have left in the previous space. "It's almost, 'No, I don't actually wanna talk about that anymore.' Once I've gotten in the car, I'm this person now. I'll just take off this mask and put the next one on" (Belinda,

Pre-2014). When Belinda felt her stamina starting to wane, she often responded by compartmentalising things further, including avoiding checking emails at home. “It was quite empowering one weekend when I didn’t do that at all. ... Not allowing work to encroach on your personal life is really important. I’d like ... to teach that to other people. But not until I do it myself” (Post-2015).

Whether participants integrated, or compartmentalised facets of their lives, they all asserted the importance of time away from work as an integral part of their long-term stamina (Focus Group, 2015). After serious health issues, Zena learned to put boundaries around her workload. “I will say though, if it’s too much for me. ... I can do that, because I know my limits, especially now. I can’t run myself down. Then who am I good for?” (Zena, Pre-2014). The research discusses this tension as ‘balancing distance and commitment’ (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 762), which connotes the tension between caring for and about the children and families/whānau while remaining detached enough for personal wellbeing. Hannah endorsed “finding time to turn off” in theory, but confessed that “it is one of the hardest things to do” (Pre-2014). Like Zena, framing breaks from casework as ultimately making her better for the students, helped her to step back when she needed to.

I think the first student that you get emotionally involved with breaks your heart, if you like. And then from then on you don’t care any less, you still care just as much. But you do learn – you have to – to keep you sane and make you any use to them. You have to learn to have periods when you turn off and leave it at the door. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

Every participant combined more and less tangible strategies for sustaining their stamina. Whilst maintaining a healthy detachment is difficult to measure, Hannah complemented this strategy with measurable physical endeavours. “When I’m studying: I have two non-negotiables – I go to yoga on a Monday and a Wednesday night for an hour and a half and that is non-negotiable” (Hannah, Pre-2014). When asked if she ever chose work over yoga, she responded, “I go even if I’ve got that much work to do. I have to go, to do it, because I know that keeps my balance” (Hannah, Pre-2014). Equally, Hannah responded to early indicators that she was getting out of

balance. “Often one of us will say ‘We need to go for a walk,’ and that [means] let’s go for a stomp and let me get it off my chest. Let’s just relieve some pressure a bit and get things back in balance” (Hannah, Pre-2014).

Grace supported them in being okay with ‘good enough’, forgiving themselves for mistakes along the way and understanding that lifelong learning is about ‘when I knew better, I did better’. Equanimity allowed them to ride the highs and lows of the work without being too pulled by either extreme. Lastly, participants found a ‘middle way’ similar to Margolis et al.’ balance between resistance and resilience (Margolis, et al., 2014).

Stamina as continual recalibrating of practice

Stamina by definition requires a long-term view of practice. Stamina necessitates continual reflection and recalibration, as professionals (re)consider and (re)adjust their lives. Stepping back to reflect on practice with a long-term view allowed participants to regain equanimity, and to have more compassion for themselves and others. At the macro-level, participants had strategies for managing their lives in ways that increased their stamina. At the micro-level, they considered their professional roles in the same way.

Getting out of balance to get back into balance

Challenge is only useful in manageable doses, and participants discussed the fine line between manageable and unmanageable loads in work and life. Professionally, they sought to have ‘just enough challenge’ (Focus Group, 2014). Personally and professionally, they mentioned the tension between meeting their own needs and meeting the needs of others. Describing this dynamic within her own family, Belinda confessed, “It’s become a juggling act to keep the [kids] happy. ... Somewhere along the line, someone misses out and it’s usually me” (Post-2014). Getting out of balance seemed to be an important aspect of balance – participants noticed the disconnects in their lives, in particular when balance at work detracted from balance at home.

You have your wellbeing at work and you have got your wellbeing at home.
... Sometimes the two don’t marry, because you could be putting more into

your professional wellbeing than you are into your personal. ... You are so tired, you go home and fall asleep. Because you have gone on a racetrack all day and then you stop and that's it. Like where did my energy go? So the professional and the personal has that wellbeing with it and sometimes they are not even. ... I am even thinking of a seesaw now because it can be up and down. (Zena, Post-2014)

Where Zena described wellbeing like a seesaw, Belinda used the metaphor of a giant wagon wheel with her at the hub. She conceptualised being well as being centred, and noticed how differently she responded to feeling off-centre with different people and in different contexts. Her response also highlights how this imbalance affected her self-perception as a parent.

[Wellbeing is] to be centred; centred in the sense that your centre is balanced and, so, therefore everything that comes off that is also balanced. ... [Years ago] I remember the Plunket nurse saying to me, "Mum's happy, everybody's happy," and it is like that. It's knowing that your mood, whatever it may be, actually affects everything. ...

For me, wellbeing is about being calm because I find that when I'm calm, once again, it radiates. Whereas if I'm a bit more fraught about something, things don't tend to go as smoothly or as well and people notice. But it's interesting, 'cause in my professional life I could be completely calm and nothing rattles me, but at home it can be quite different and I don't understand. I can put up with other people's kids all day, I can be so nice to them and then I have my own kids at home and I'm like, "Oh, [expletive]." ... For me, my goal would be to find a way of making sure that balance goes across everything. That you're not giving you best to the kids at school and not the kids at home. ... Or to yourself, even. It's okay to put yourself in front of other people sometimes as well. (Belinda, Pre-2014)

The reality and discourse of 'busy-ness'

Participants cited busy-ness as a huge threat to their stamina. This included genuinely being too busy to pause, reflect, and catch their breath, and also the unnecessary and

unproductive 'busy being busy' (Belinda, 2015) they saw increasingly in education. "It's unhealthy for you to walk around so wound up all the time. ... What is it that you can let go of, so you're not so wound up? Sometimes stamina is about ... getting that feedback, that you're being a madwoman" (Finella, Focus Group, 2015).

For Kirsten (Focus Group, 2015), being too busy was a reality that drastically impacted her stamina. In her first year of the role, and her first year of the postgraduate study, she experienced too high a learning curve and too many different learning curves.

I know I'm very systematic ... if everything's in the right boxes, it works well; if things are all outside and all chaotic then my brain is not settled and it doesn't matter which aspect of my life it is, it has an effect on all of them. So thinking in terms of wellbeing in life and in work ... at the beginning of the year when I started this journey, I felt like everything was in those little boxes. I knew where I was at with study and with my role. ... Then I started having more things outside those boxes, and more things outside those boxes, and reached a point where it was difficult to put them into those boxes because I had more questions than I had answers.

Kirsten's example is useful in exploring instances where stance, support and stamina don't come in equal measure. As Kirsten noted, "I knew where my stance was. But when I think about stamina and resilience, I was a little bit lost". She attributed this to "too many things out of order. And I thought some of those things had gone back into the boxes but there's still a lot outside, which effects my stamina." There were days when Kirsten felt a sense of fulfilment – "on some days the light comes on and I have a great sense of fulfilment" – but these days were few and far between. "Other days ... there are so many things outside of my boxes, my resilience, motivation and stamina are impacted quite a lot. ... If I wasn't so systematic it probably wouldn't make so much difference to me but it does" (Kirsten, Focus Group, 2015).

Kirsten shared her thoughts at the final focus group meeting, and her perspective of the role was affirmed by the group. Participants confirmed that busy-ness is feeling less like a temporary occurrence and more like a permanent state. They see this as impacting on the quality of their work and their relationships (Focus Group, 2015).

Korthagen warns of the reduced likelihood of deep learning in survivor mode (2009). Lola felt this keenly as she balanced study with her first year in a new professional role and in a new city. In a discussion of barriers, Lola identified “your willingness not to change or not to want to grow.” However, she qualified her statement, “If you are feeling really overloaded, you are in that survival mode ... taking it in [but] you don’t have enough time to reflect really, to get enough out of it. You are just going through the motions of getting done what you have to get done” (Lola, Post-2014). Lola stressed the extent to which she was learning just-in-time on the job, but could not always see the additional relevance of coursework. Because she could not understand “where it was going to get me in terms of my job”, she saw study as “an extra stress load rather than me gaining a lot more knowledge” (Lola, Post-2014).

Alongside genuine busy-ness, several participants bemoaned the current state, where ‘busy’ is conflated with productive and ‘tired’ is seen as a badge of honour. It may be also that rushing around, and looking overwhelmed, protects people from entering into vulnerable discussions about practice. Hannah (Pre-2014) referred to a tacit rule in education, whereby the person staying latest is held up as being the most dedicated and productive.

I think you have to be careful not to fall into that trap, and not to fall into the habit of doing it just because you’ve always done it, or because somebody else does it. You have to know what’s right for you, and ... [sometimes say] ‘Well, actually no, this is my time.’ Often, that’s actually quite hard to do and you feel somebody might judge you for that. That then goes back to ... what you feel is more important than what somebody’s judging. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

Belinda also fought back against the discourse of being busy, with a strategy that benefited others and helped her to ground herself.

The one thing I decided when I took on my new job was that whenever someone comes to my office door, I always go ‘Oh hi, how are you? Come in.’ They will probably say, ‘Oh, I know you are probably busy’ and I always say, ‘No, I am not. I always have time for you. Come on in.’ That makes me

feel calm. When a parent or a student or a teacher comes to my door, whatever they need to talk about is important for them and they don't really care if I have got 25 things on my list. For them, [their concern] is important so for me it's important. (Belinda, Post-2015)

Busy-ness threatens stamina as it prevents deep reflection; racing through To Do lists, people are less likely to take a step back to prioritise. Moreover, by accident or design, busy-ness prevents people from being real with each other. Answering the question "How are you?" with "Busy" shuts down a potential conversation about self and practice. No vulnerability is shared and both parties lose out on the feeling of "me too" that comes with deep sharing. This tendency resonates with Edwards' (2005) research, which tracked student teachers becoming "polished performers ... unable to admit to any difficulty" (p. 176). She described these teachers as "rarely look[ing] for help from other teachers and avoid[ing] situations which led from their prepared lesson plans. ... It was too risky for them to deviate ... and perhaps produce a less than polished performance" (p. 176) which diminished their learning, identity development and responsiveness.

In both cases, busy-ness forestalls Kirsten and others from getting the help they need. When everyone is professing busy-ness, it becomes difficult to monitor who is genuinely struggling. Kirsten believed her struggles were on par with everyone else's, which made it harder to ask for and receive help (Post-2015). Vulnerability requires courage, saying out loud that one is not managing; this is more difficult when everyone else appears to be racing around *and* managing, or people worry they are the only ones not managing. As such, busy-ness masks real problems, acts as a barrier to vulnerability, and threatens the stamina of professionals.

Learning from imbalance

Mia lost her husband to suicide years ago. Her explanation of a difficult time showcases the way participants' meaning-making around significant events impacts their stamina. In Mia's case, this involved the positive meaning she has made of her situation.

That was a really hard time in my life: being a solo mum and bringing up my [child]. But, in fact, it's a positive thing because I'm a very kind and caring person and I understand where people come from because I had a hard time with that and I've been through a lot. The positive thing that came out of that was [a specific support for her child] ... through that tragedy. I still keep in contact with my husband's whānau and they are my whānau. It's lovely and they've been very supportive with me when I finished my degree. They were amazing and looked after [my child] when I was going through my degree. I have been very fortunate in my life. (Mia, Pre-2014)

Like Mia and Lola, Zena drew positive meaning from a difficult time. When asked to describe a period of wellbeing, Zena described waking up in the post-op area after surgery and being told she didn't have cancer. Being so unwell had given her a new perspective; she described that perspective and the way it shaped her personal and professional practices.

Relationships are more important than anything else. Time is quite precious but the things that you do and the labels that you have don't matter. What's the point if you've got no one to share them with? ... I just wanted to be with my husband more, spend time with the kids and the grandkids. We'd lie in bed longer. ... We weren't in a rush to go anywhere. I was quite content just to be, not to be doing. My husband always described me as a To Do list. ... Now it's not so much of a to do list, I just be, just enjoy. (Zena, Pre-2014)

Previously, like some of the other participants, Zena had prioritised physical wellbeing, and gauged her overall wellbeing by her physical state. Having been so sick, and after a long period of slow recovery, Zena described the ways her health issues had changed her. Specifically, she developed a more expansive, holistic definition of wellbeing.

You know how they talk about the stars in alignment. It's about getting a perspective, getting your perspective in alignment and not just in one place but in all facets of your life. I guess you could've called me a compulsive

obsessive fitness fanatic, but to maintain that kind of lifestyle isn't a priority for me now. Being healthy is, but you can't just be physically healthy and not mentally healthy or spiritually healthy or emotionally healthy. It doesn't work like that, now I know. ... It's like we study quite a lot but I can't do that 24/7 and be happy. It's not natural. ... It's giving justice to all of them without overdoing it. I don't think you can ever be even, but you can be more aware. ... It's not perfection – wellbeing – it's being aware of how to share yourself amongst all those, well, I think Te Whara Tapa Wha. (Zena, Pre-2014)

Zena also began to determine her own limits, and to articulate these limits to others. In her practice, she included learning to say no.

For some, these disconnections served as inner teachers, and motivated participants to make changes in their lives. Other times, when the solutions felt less within their control, the disconnects had a demoralising effect. Hannah shared several positive examples of feeling out of balance, and being guided by this disequilibrium to make significant changes in her life. In response to lives in the UK that felt out of balance, she and her husband quit their jobs, sold their home and moved to Aotearoa New Zealand. They systematically examined their lives and their jobs, kept the aspects that were working and “jettisoned the bits that [weren't]”. Hannah decided she “was going to ‘just’ be a classroom teacher.” She loved the new role and the new life. But after a time, things started piling up again. “The syndicate leader went on maternity leave and I was asked to do that and ... ‘Can you do that?’ and ‘Can you do this?’ And after five years I'd got back to the juggling stage again.” Hannah described the way she stepped back from the situation to notice the impact it was having on her health and her family. Increasingly she honoured her own wisdom, and described how this guided her actions and her wellbeing.

Hannah: It is knowing your own body and listening to it. I think that is something that has taken me a long time to understand. ... It is trying things. It is knowing when to say, ‘Okay great, I have tried it and it has been fantastic but actually, no, thanks very much.’

Wendy: Knowing what to let go of.

Hannah: It is really and so I think that is part of the wellbeing as well. I think it is being content and it is knowing yourself and knowing when, listening to your inner self as to when it is time to change things. Like when you were saying to me do I miss being in the classroom? I don't now because it was time to move. It is knowing when to listen to what you really want to do. I mean, to take this job I actually took an \$8000 drop in salary, but would I go back for \$8000? No thank you. So it is knowing and getting that balance right. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

Belinda described burnout in her previous role; how she knew, how she responded.

Five years in a leadership role and I woke up one day and I thought, 'Nah, I'm not doing this anymore'. I phoned my principal and I said, 'I will be back, but I'm not gonna be back this week,' and that was it. I knew I had to go. ... I can remember driving [my children] to school crying, just thinking, 'No, I can't do this anymore. I cannot deal with the parents, I cannot deal with the workload and the expectations and everything.' But I knew I wanted to stay in teaching. (Post-2014)

She brought that self-wisdom and sense of her own limits to her specialist teaching role. Her explanation highlights the ways she learned from imbalance, as well as the connections between her stamina and wellbeing.

In this new role, the wellbeing has come in where I can say no to stuff. If someone asks me, 'Would you like to help run this professional development?' I say, 'Oh, not really.' And I think, 'No.' ... No one's gonna get offended if you say no, but it's also me saying, 'No, I've been there and I've done that and I don't wanna go back to being that kind of person'. (Belinda, Post-2014)

For Hannah, Belinda and others, it was the agency they felt around making the choices that made all the difference for them.

Wellbeing is when you feel that your life is balanced and you feel supported. That you feel cared for. That you feel strong in your beliefs. That you give yourself time. I think as mums and as females as well, we're very good at putting everybody else first and it's taken me a long time to work that one out, so, I think that's important. Also, you're doing something that you want to do, that interests you and that you want to do it and you're doing it because it's what you want to do, not because it's what you've got to do. I think that's really important.

... I think it is [about balance], but then balance not in the juggling sense but almost in the horizontal sense. When I think about the balance, I think about it almost like a plane and at times it's out of balance and it ends up a bit like that. I think if it's right you're like this [demonstrates a horizontal plane] and therefore you feel better, you feel more in control, you have the options to make. Sure, there are times when it's really busy and I know that I'm gonna end up spending a large percentage of my holiday getting the assignment done, but that's my choice. I've chosen to do the course. ... That's a choice I've made, and it's having those choices, the chances to make the choices. (Hannah, Pre-2014)

'When I knew better, I did better'

For participants, obtaining 'just enough' challenge and thriving long-term in a complex and ever-changing field necessitated working outside of their own comfort zones. As part of this, they had to remain open to the discomfort that comes with not knowing, being challenged and being wrong. They learned to show grace to themselves and others through the process. Sam (Post-2015) struggled with aspects of this: "I am very stubborn in the moment, too much so. ... If I get into a fight ... that's the point that I'm sticking to and I won't let go of it." She was mindful of this tendency to be intractable, and responded by giving herself space to reflect. "Just let me go away and let me think about what you have said. ... I need that. ... I sometimes have to go away from the IEP,

go away from that meeting and reflect on the perspective [of] the parent.” After some time and reflection, she reported “I [still] might not agree ... you don’t always change the stance, but it’s a more informed position then”. Sam extended this same grace to the teachers with whom she worked. “They have got themselves locked into ‘this is how I do it’ and ‘this is my way’ and they are quite resistant to change. ... It’s helping them to let go”.

Positive self-talk went hand in hand with strong self-understanding. As participants talked about the language they used to story their practice, I was often reminded of Maya Angelou’s quote “I did then what I knew best. When I knew better, I did better.” It was important for participants to narrate their experiences in ways that supported their stamina, and Friend struggled with this the most. As a professional who worried that she’d “snuck in the back door as a parent,” (Post-2014) she needed to catch and reframe these destructive thoughts.

That is just one of those doubter voices that I need to shush. ... You have to allow the other people in your head [and] ... the other things that you are really good at that confirm how good you are and why you are where you are. You have to allow those ones to speak and tell the other ones to shush. (Friend, Post-2014)

Similarly, rather than lamenting a head injury she’d incurred a decade ago, Katie focused on how her personal difficulties made her a better professional.

Having experienced brain injury, [I know] those invisible things like depression, anxiety and stuff have a huge impact on young people and adults. But because people can’t see it, it is often discounted. And wellbeing can be seen as an airy-fairy kind of thing that people are challenged by. Acknowledging it and valuing it ... I think it needs to be valued. (Pre-2014)

Like Katie, many of the participants had extensive personal and professional experience with diverse learners prior to becoming specialist teachers and undertaking postgraduate study. As they learned new ways of doing things, they had to extend

grace to their former selves, and their former decisions. As Friend gathered specialist knowledge around a specific impairment, she questioned the decisions she had made as a parent of children with the same impairment. “It has been a bit of a dilemma ... reflecting on things like who I was when I first became a parent and the choices that I’m made [versus] the choices that I would probably make if I was in that position now. That’s been tricky” (Friend, Pre-2014). Learning more about the field, she started to wonder whether “there may be some people out there who would view my choices as wrong”. As she described the path she took in parenting children with impairments, Friend commented, “I don’t think I’ll ever change that, but I just know there would be some people who wouldn’t see that as a good choice” (Pre-2014). Daphne felt a similar professional twinge. “Having to do the study ... sort of made me aware ... how much I didn’t know before that I should have done. Even more aware that the [professional development] I thought we were getting was quite good really wasn’t, it was very narrow” (Post-2015).

As with Friend and Daphne, Sam (Pre-2014) had to challenge her own narrative. She noted that “I’m not a perfectionist, I wouldn’t describe myself as one in life, but I tend to be when it comes to study”. Sam negotiated the tension by reminding herself that ‘good enough’ is enough, and “giv[ing] myself permission not to get an A+. Because it creates stress if I know I’m handing something in that I don’t think is my best work and it frustrates me enormously, and that is hard for me” (Pre-2014).

Belinda (Pre-2014) was more comfortable with not knowing: “There’s times when I will say, ‘I don’t feel qualified to deal with this’ so I know I need some support. ... It would be arrogant to think that I know everything.” Positioning herself as a lifelong learner helped her to have grace in moments of not knowing. “I am always asking people’s advice and opinion. ‘What would you do?’ Often, even when I have worked through a situation and it has been resolved, I will say to another [colleague], ‘What would you have done?’” For Belinda, this was “sometimes about reassurance ... but sometimes it’s that I know that person will do it differently. And I want to hear what they have got to say and then I put it in my toolbox and carry on” (Belinda, Pre-2014).

Participants found grace was even more important in evaluating their long-term impact. Akin to Sam's metaphor of being part of a circuit, Hannah's strategy was to focus on her input rather than the outcomes. "I think you just have to say, 'Look, I have done my best. I did what I thought was right at the time and I have tried really hard.'" She then affirmed her intention with a firm commitment to stay involved until she was more satisfied with the results. "If you can put your hand on heart and say, 'I have tried really hard for that child ... okay, well let's go back to the drawing board. I am not going to walk away let's try something else'" (Hannah, Pre-2015).

Kelchtermans first noted the importance of developing stamina, and identified threats to stamina which include the structural vulnerabilities inherent in teaching (2008). To extend the conversation, I considered stamina from the perspectives of specialist teachers, operationalised Kelchtermans' (2008) ideas in a Aotearoa New Zealand context and further explored the connections between stance and stamina. The present study indicates that stamina fortifies specialist teachers to weather the ups and downs of practice, and to make the 'tiny tweaks' (David, 2016, p. 13) that rebuild their stance, fulfilment and supports. Guided by their stance, specialist teachers make decisions about when to let go and when to fight back as a way of preserving their stamina.

Margolis et al. (2014) critique portrayals of resilience as "teachers' individual survival characteristics and super-human capacity to withstand excessive workplace hardships to remain in the profession" (p. 391). I hoped to move away from this view with teachers in my own research. In my first interviews, compounded by my focus on wellbeing, participants talked about yoga and other activities as strategies for keeping themselves healthy in spite of workload pressures. Acknowledging the inherent importance of self-care strategies, but inspired by Margolis et al., I wanted to shift the conversation to include the ways specialist teachers actively resisted workplace pressures as well.

Stamina, in this study, thus became a conversation about discernment: clarifying priorities, choosing key issues, and learning how to take an effective stand. Participants reflected on the ways they were "mindful", rather than solely resistant"

and developed the “skills in taking oppositional stances” (Margolis et al., 2014, p. 391). Their stamina drew on their stance in ways that honoured the past and kept a desired future in mind (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). In this way, participants took strength in, and enacted, their own “professionalism, expertise, and commitment” (Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 31).

Findings from the present study suggest that maintaining one’s stamina is a never ending process; not every participant experienced sustained stamina or knew exactly how to bolster their waning stamina. Akin to David’s (2016) Teeter-Totter Principle (p. 13), participants worked to keep themselves in a zone with “the perfect balance between challenge and competence so [they] are neither complacent nor overwhelmed but are instead excited, enthusiastic, and invigorated by challenges” (p. 13). As with the dynamic movement of a teeter-totter, participants continued to make short- and long-term changes to their lives and their practice to achieve a mix of challenge and comfort most likely to result in fierce practice.

For some, who saw getting out of balance as a way to get back in balance, periods of disequilibrium served as ‘inner teachers’ and motivated participants to make changes in their lives. Katie thought of this as recognising, then facing, her own vulnerabilities (Post-2015). Hannah was a good example of this. Realising how far off track she had veered from the life she wanted, she quit her job and moved countries as a way of realigning her life with her priorities.

More often, the changes were subtle, such as looking at their lives in a different way. Sam, for example, learned to be okay with ‘good enough’, forgave herself for mistakes made along the way and approached lifelong learning with a ‘when I knew better, I did better’ attitude. Belinda reminded herself to remain open to the discomfort that comes with not knowing, being challenged and being wrong. In both of these cases, their self-compassion fueled their lifelong learning, as David intones, “forgiving ourselves for our mistakes or imperfections so we can move on to better, more productive things” (2016, p. 70).

What many participants had in common was a plan for stamina in their roles. The specifics of their plans were less important than their intentionality. Finding what

worked best for them alone, supported them in bolstering their long-term stamina and remaining nimble in their practice. They learned, not always successfully, to ride the highs and lows of the work without being too pulled by either extreme.

Conclusion

The present study was situated in one professional education programme and explored the lives of experienced teachers typically at the start of careers in specialist teaching. These teachers had returned to postgraduate study, mostly alongside full-time work and often in roles that were new to them. The teachers in this study chose to switch roles as part of their commitment to supporting children and young people and their families/whānau who have been historically marginalised due to ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and so on.

In their new roles, participants navigated the familiar tensions of time, workloads and funding. Additionally, they worked to minimise the barriers to inclusive education they encountered in their contexts, including misperceptions of their roles and the deficitising of certain groups of children and families/whānau. Participants practised fiercely, as they strived to support others and find fulfilment in amongst the tensions of working in an education context still caught between stories of inclusive and special education (Moore et al, 1999). They built what they saw as essential elements of practice into their roles irrespective of time pressures and limited organisational support (Focus Group, 2014). This included, for example, spending additional time building relationships with teachers and families/whānau, and providing wraparound supports such as driving families to meetings and medical appointments. Because this group of teachers added these tasks to their jobs, typically without reducing other requirements of the role, they consistently exceeded the job requirements. Consequently, this had both positive and negative implications for their wellbeing.

This chapter presented and unpacked the five elements of *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*, a conceptual framework for developing and maintaining the fulfilment of teachers and the original contribution of this research. This framework was developed alongside specialist teachers, always with the intent of having wider utility for all educators including tertiary teachers.

Fulfilment, the superordinate construct, is the framework but is not in the framework. This is done intentionally to underscore the idea of fulfilment as the by-product rather than the aim of fierce practice. Fulfilment is relational, ongoing and generative. Perhaps surprisingly, it often comes from the most challenging situations, ones in which teachers are forced to consider and walk their values. Practising fiercely is the outward-facing dimension of their work, and includes the relational ways participants framed and co-created their roles to be able to enact their stance, supports and stamina. These last three elements have stand-alone and connected qualities. Importantly, as practice is a collective activity, stance, supports and stamina have both individual and collective components. Stance is deep, integrated and enacted self-understanding with an emphasis on genuine connectedness and dynamic action. Supports include every layer of the ecology and both the giving and receiving of support. Stamina, bolstered by stance and supports, is distinct in its long term view and ongoing recalibration of self-and-practice and in the way it lifts stance, supports and practice. The relevance of this framework as a whole is explored in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 – Findings and Discussion of the Framework “Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina”

This chapter considers the implications of a framework for *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*. Theory and findings are integrated to explicate the ways the present study contributes to the field of knowledge, as depicted in the table below. Following on from Chapter 6, which built up the individual elements of the framework, Chapter 7 considers the intersection of the five dimensions of practising fiercely, fulfilment, stance, supports and stamina.

Table 12. Implications of a framework for Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Revisiting the participants | | |
| Understanding the framework of <i>Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina</i> | | |
| Unpacking the framework of <i>Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina</i> | Practising Fiercely through Stance, Supports and Stamina | |
| Practising fiercely | Positioning The ‘expert model’ as a major tension; three circles of evidence as an alternative Job crafting | Intensification and tensions as opportunities Working within the three circles of evidence as an alternate professional pathway Legitimising craft knowledge through the second circle Knowing and not knowing Resilience through resistance |

Revisiting the participants

Of the fourteen participants, nine were employed as resource teachers of learning and behaviour (RTLB) at the beginning of the study. They were based in geographical 'clusters' with other RTLB and each RTLB itinerated to serve a group of primary and secondary schools. The proportion of RTLB in the study is similar to the proportion in both the Specialist Teaching programme. The other five participants were specialist teachers from other areas (Autism, Blind and Low Vision, Complex Educational Needs, Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Early Intervention). One of these participants was based full-time in a secondary school, two were in early childhood centres; one worked full-time for a private specialist support centre; and one worked two days a week as a relieving teacher in one primary school.

Over the period of this study, of the fourteen participants, only five stayed in the same role. This means that nine of the participants changed their jobs. Of the nine RTLB in the study, only three stayed in the same cluster throughout and beyond the study. Two RTLB shifted to different clusters, three returned to school-based leadership roles and one returned to the classroom. Of the five in other specialist teaching roles, two stayed in the same role throughout and beyond the study. Two found school-based leadership roles; one took a leave of absence.

In explaining their choices, participants most often cited mismatches between the ways they hoped to support children, teachers and families/whānau and the strict requirements of the role. As one example, Katie believed that incorporating her counselling skills into her specialist teaching role would enhance her practice and her team environment. She was told these skills were not a part of the job, which diminished her skill set and her sense of belonging. Unsurprisingly, she left the role soon after.

In articulating their stance, participants voiced their commitment to supporting others and their confidence in their own ability to do so. However, they were equally committed to finding professional roles which genuinely facilitated their ability to work in the ways they viewed as best. When this was not the case, these specialist teachers

left their teams or organisations in search of a better fit, one where they might have a bigger impact and work in ways better aligned with the contributions they hoped to make. Lola, for example, returned to the classroom as the space she believed she could make the biggest difference to children and families/whānau. Finella and Katie found school-based roles. Mia found fulfilment in the specialist teaching role, after switching contexts to find a space where she could indeed craft her job. In the first context, Mia's professionalism and cultural capital was dismissed; she felt she didn't have a voice, and was being micromanaged by her manager. In the same role, but a different context, she was valued as bringing her much-needed and unique cultural wisdom to the group. Expanding her role to include cultural leadership, she was able to tap into her talents and passions, which fortified her stance and lifted her stamina.

If these fourteen participants are a glimpse into the wider state of play, specialist teachers continue to encounter professional hurdles in an education system still caught between the paradigms of inclusive and special education (Moore, 1999). As such, the present study may be useful in identifying the supports specialist teachers need in their professional lives, particularly during especially intense periods. It is also hoped that the present study is useful to all teachers and other in the field of education. Although these findings are not meant to be generalised, the most personal is often the most universal (Kelchtermans, 2008). It is hoped that every teacher can glimpse themselves in these stories, relating to and gleaning from the ways these specialist teachers crafted their roles and their lives.

Understanding the framework of *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*

The group of participants in the present study supported the development of a conceptual framework for fulfilment as comprised of stance, supports and stamina. Stance invoked their professional identities, but in the more physical ways they were enacted in their practice, or in what David (2016) might call *walking their why*. For example, Finella responded to new referrals by meeting with the family/whānau, although it is customary to start with the school, to reinforce the centrality of family.

Supports were the positive aspects of each layer of their ecology, including their personal characteristics, features of their microsystems and the people in their lives. *Stamina* was their longer-term ability to craft their roles and their lives in ways that utilised their strengths, fitted with their values and skills, and otherwise worked for them. Practising fiercely comprised these three elements, and enabled specialist teachers to prioritise their commitments, discern where and how they could make the biggest difference, and stay in their own challenge zone. Pulled together, and mediated through fierce practice, stance, supports and stamina contributed to *fulfilment*, or the self-renewing power of a life well-lived.

The framework may have utility at various layers of the ecology in which specialist teachers live and work. At the individual level, the framework could be useful for teachers, or mentors and others supporting teachers, to explore aspects of their lives that might be enabling or hindering their overall fulfilment. It may be used preventatively or in response to early signs of burnout to take a holistic look at one's life, explore that which is and isn't working, and how every dimension contributes to the whole.

Zooming out from the individual, schools perpetually wonder how best to support teacher wellbeing; interventions such as stress management programmes and changing the tasks of teachers have met with limited success (Naghieh, Montgomery, Bonell, Thompson & Aber, 2015). In designing supports, there is a need to acknowledge the complexities of understanding wellbeing and the variations amongst teachers' experiences. Findings from the present study indicate a fundamental difficulty in the way support continues to be framed as an add-on, done *to* professionals more often than *with* them, and never quite addressing the tension between individual and institutional wellbeing (Margolis et al., 2014). The framework may be useful both to empower teachers and to restructure workplaces to encourage role crafting in ways that benefit the individual and the microsystem.

Another the layer of the microsystem, the present study hopes to inform tertiary institutions' dilemmas around student support. In response to questions of how and how much support should be offered, and provided by whom (Laws & Fiedler, 2012),

findings from this study suggest that wellbeing is the concern of everyone, and should be integrated within rather than siloed from core curriculum content. The framework provides a holistic structure for identity development that is flexible enough to be adapted by different programmes and departments.

Irrespective of the layer of the ecology, the framework could be used to explore and lift the fulfilment, stance, supports and stamina of professionals as a way of nourishing their fierce practice. Each aspect could be considered explicitly, then woven sustainably, through our professional programmes, our practice and our lives.

Unpacking the framework of *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*

The framework is general, by design, and fluid rather than fixed. Fulfilment, as the superordinate construct, is the culmination of stance, supports and stamina and achieved through practising fiercely. Fulfilment is a natural by-product of living and practising well and true, a source of continued strength and integrity in a self-renewing system, and a litmus test for considering one's life. In a similar paradox to happiness, where "deliberately striving for it is fundamentally incompatible with the nature of happiness itself" (David, 2016, p. 57), this group of specialist teachers conceptualised fulfilment as a consequence of a life well-lived, rather than a direct aim.

A sense of fulfilment may be a sign of things working well; a lack of fulfilment might signal that things are not. Both situations provide an opportunity to step back, reflect on and refine the individual components of fulfilment. During periods of fulfilment, professionals can identify strategies for maintaining their stance, supports and stamina in order to sustain and further their fulfilment. How can they continue to live their lives in ways that provide fulfilment in hindsight, as well as a source of renewal in the current moment?

In periods devoid of fulfilment, it may be useful to explore the separate elements of stance, supports and stamina to pinpoint potential barriers and unrealised enablers. What does fulfilment mean to the person; what does it look like? Have they

experienced it before, and what was different about their lives and selves at that time? What supported them in the past, to get through phases of limited fulfilment? Who and what are their supports now, and how might they add to these? To what extent do they feel able to practise fiercely, and what is getting in the way?

The framework emphasises process over product, as a meaningful life will look different for every person. Fulfilment is not predicated on equal amounts of stance, supports and stamina. Whilst these components form the whole of fulfilment, the nature and extent of each dimension will vary for individuals and across time. In this way, the framework acknowledges individual sensibilities and circumstances: different people need different things, and different things at different times. The framework's utility is as a reflective tool, adding structure to a deep analysis of self, practice and context to examine areas specialist teachers might not otherwise contemplate. It supports teachers to systematically consider and improve the integration of their lives and their work in order to find a fulfilling combination.

To illustrate the unique mixture, consider the professional with a more individualistic sensibility. Preferring to work on her own, she might favour *stance* over the other dimensions, and frame *supports* more in terms of her own characteristics of persistence and determination, rather than the supports of others. For her, *stamina* might be an independent endeavour, one in which she revisits dark times she has endured in the past to reinforce her deep faith in her ability to prevail. Using the framework to unpack her preferred ways of being, she can identify gaps and remedies in each area but continue to fortify her stance and stamina in ways that have previously worked for her. Alternatively, she can consider different, more collective, ways of working and note how the change influences her sense of fulfilment.

As another example, exploring how the mixture can shift over time and circumstance, consider a person with a more collective sensibility who has relocated to a new area. New to specialist teaching, but always most fulfilled when working alongside others, he might struggle with having limited external support from colleagues/friends and feel the impact on his stamina. If local supports are what is needed, he can identify the specific types of supports and actively create them in the new setting. Concurrently, he

can use the opportunity to strengthen internal sources of support such as his personal belief system and character strengths. He can also redefine the way he draws on supports from those at a distance, and refine his stance and stamina in light of new learning. Most importantly, he can reflect on what worked in his prior life, and what he would need to find fulfilment in his new life.

The present study aligns with aspects of McInerney, Ganotice, King, Morin and Marsh's (2015) study which examined teachers' commitment to their role and to their occupation, and postulated a causal link to their psychological wellbeing. In their research, positive measures of wellbeing included thriving, feeling recognised and wanting to be involved at work, and a sense of professional competency. In the present study, however, participants indicated that their commitment to the role could differ significantly from commitment to the organisation, and these two factors needed to be disaggregated to fully understand stance.

Practising fiercely through stance, supports and stamina

Participants in the present study described practising fiercely as both the framing and co-construction of their practice. In terms of framing their roles, participants' fulfilment seemed to be influenced by their ability to both celebrate the positive aspects of their roles and to see the tensions as opportunities to live out their values. As a salient example of repositioning, participants disavowed the expert model and what they saw as its continued influence on education. As an alternative, they viewed their growing capacity to work at the intersection of the three circles of evidence (research, professional wisdom and client voice) as a meaningful professional learning pathway. In relation to creating roles which would reflect their values, skills and potential contribution, participants engaged in job crafting. They shaped their roles as they were shaped by their roles, and in consideration of the balance of resistance and resilience that might best support their long term stamina.

Practising fiercely

In the present study, where fulfilment was the *why* and stance, supports and stamina were the *what*, practising fiercely emerged as the *how*. As introduced in Chapter 5,

practising fiercely connotes the empowered approach specialist teachers in the present study took to their work: participants conceptualised this approach as knowing themselves, choosing their battles, and ‘fighting the good fight’. Determining where best to put their energies required a strong stance, which served as a moral compass of sorts as they navigated the ups and downs of their careers.

These findings suggest the extent to which positioning influences our fulfilment, stance, stamina and supports, and situates practising fiercely as a central part of the overall framework. According to participants, practising fiercely draws primarily from stance as teachers are guided by their own priorities and non-negotiables, what they’ve learned from the past and their hopes for the future (Tedder & Biesta, 2009). It flows from and feeds into stamina, as professionals choose their battles in consideration of long-term fulfilment through day-to-day actions. Practising fiercely is steeped in supports: the deep recognition that we are all connected and that our actions matter. Practising fiercely is about discernment, identifying and championing priorities and working alongside others to maximise the collective contribution to children, families/whānau and systems.

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the specialist teachers in the present study measured the effectiveness of their practice in relational ways. In their stories of practice, their sense of success seemed to be predicated on the extent to which they had lifted the child, family/whānau, teacher or system. For example, their fulfilment might be linked to a child’s smooth transition to school, social inclusion in the classroom, or successful funding application. The difficulty for all teachers, however, is that they, “can only to a very limited degree prove their effectiveness by claiming that pupils’ results directly follow from their actions” (Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 32). This challenge is heightened for specialist teachers practising an additional layer out in the ecology, supporting teachers and families/whānau rather than working directly with students. Working alongside teachers to shift teaching practices, student outcomes are often beyond specialist teachers’ control. “Very often teachers are not allowed to witness when the seed of their efforts finds fertile ground to develop” (Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 32). In this practice context, with the challenges of evidencing one’s impact, fulfilment based solely on outcomes for others could be frustrating or demoralising.

Participants saw practising fiercely as a useful counterbalance to relational outcome measures and notions of success based on student achievement. Practising fiercely focuses equally on that which is within teacher's control, keeping that strong focus on others but with an equal focus on teachers' own actions and intentions. Specialist teachers can thus feel good about who they are, what they are accomplishing, and what they are trying to accomplish in spite of barriers beyond their control. Put simply, fulfilment can then be about what they prioritise, how hard they fight, and how pleased they are with their actions irrespective of the outcomes.

Practising fiercely is highly contextualised. Biesta and Tedder (2007) reject notions of agency as a power, instead positioning agency as something achieved by means of one's environment. Practising fiercely is well aligned with this contextualised conception of agency, as it acknowledges the actions and intentions of a specialist teacher alongside a deep regard for enablers and barriers in the ecology. For participants in the current study, it was important to appreciate the extent to which their actions were supported and hindered across their environments, and why they could achieve something in one microsystem but not in another. This might include a successful transition to school for one child, but not another; a strong working relationship with one school or family, but not another, or being able stay calm at work but not at home. "The achievement of agency depends on the availability of economic, cultural and social resources within a particular ecology" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137). If every teacher is at a different stage of the inclusive education journey (Florian & Graham, 2014), and every environment is more or less ready to respond to the needs of all learners, specialist teachers will have varying degrees of success in their roles. Understanding this buffers them to an extent, allowing them to take the learning from less optimal outcomes without the heaviness that comes with a sense of failure.

According to participants in the present study, the concept of practising fiercely returns to them the power to determine their own effectiveness. This fits with Edwards' (2005) balanced notion of relational agency, which expands professionals' personal interpretations and resources through aligned actions with others but retains individual learning. Edwards argues for the place of individual learning within joint

action, as I argue for the slice of wellbeing and fulfilment that should remain within the control of the individual.

The idea of practising fiercely as a way to achieve fulfilment aligns with Seligman's claims around happiness and life satisfaction (2012). In the first phase of the present study, exploring the construct of wellbeing inadvertently narrowed participants' focus to that of Seligman's *pleasant life*. Shifting the focus to fulfilment deepened the conversation, and participants considered aspects of their lives resonating more with an *engaged life*, and a *meaningful life*. Practising fiercely seems to dovetail with Seligman's assertion "there are no shortcuts to flow. On the contrary, you need to deploy your highest strengths and talents to meet the world in flow" (p. 11).

Moreover, fulfilment was very much about the meaning and purpose that participants sought in their lives and in their practice (p. 12). Zena and Belinda treated every child as if s/he were their own and every parent as they would want to be treated, fighting to be able to meet in their homes and involve them more authentically in the school environment. Friend challenged herself to have difficult conversations with families/whānau, even when this was hard for her. These are examples of work that was difficult but fulfilling, as it allowed them to infuse their work with their own values.

Just as my study moved away from the construct of wellbeing to fulfilment, Seligman shifted his focus from happiness to wellbeing, and for similar reasons. Seligman worried that happiness was conflated with cheerfulness (2012). His revised PERMA theory maintained key elements of his original theory – re-envisioned as *positive emotion, engagement and meaning* – and added *relationships and accomplishment* (2012). The present study emphasised the importance of relationships as well, but less so accomplishments for their own sake. This could be the result of research situated in Aotearoa New Zealand, within a culture so influenced by collectivism, and with specialist teachers steeped in an education context premised on lifting outcomes for those who have been historically marginalised. Therefore, participants tended to focus on the accomplishments of others, and the accomplishments at the group level, more than individual accomplishments for their own sake or otherwise. As such, the present study moves knowledge further by considering culture.

In his 2008 work on teacher wellbeing, calling attention to the importance of self-study and the connection to wellbeing, Kelchtermans critiques common notions of wellness. Instead, he proposes an expanded definition of wellbeing as

critical self-analysis, with the courage to speak out and stand for something, and with the inner strength to engage in dialogues – possibly critical dialogues – about one’s actions as a teacher and the stamina to make this a basic attitude of the profession. (Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 32)

This definition resonates strongly with the *what* and *how* of the framework developed as part of the present study, as practising fiercely seems to come from and feed into a strong, dynamic stance. The present study contributes to the discussion started by Kelchtermans; his notions of stance and stamina are operationalised in an Aotearoa New Zealand context and located within an overall framework for teacher fulfilment.

Positioning

Speakers position others and are, in turn, positioned in a shifting set of relationships and within evolving storylines. How parts are assigned and played out reveal how events are understood as well as convey a sense of how one understands self and others. (Bullough, 2005, p. 33)

For the teachers in the present study, positioning signified the ways they framed their roles in response to their stance. Like other teachers, specialist teachers have years of teaching experience, and a commitment to meeting the needs of all learners. Lola, for example, described seeing a need in her context and believing she could do something to fill that need.

At that stage, [specialist teachers] where I was from didn’t have a very good name. ... As a classroom teacher, there was no one really to turn to because the service wasn’t good. But I knew that it could be. I knew there must be assessments out there that you can use for the kids; there must be great resources out there. I just didn’t have access to them or the knowledge. I thought, this can’t be right. So, I thought, nah, bugger it, I’m

gonna become a [specialist teacher] and actually do the training and see what's out there. (Lola, Pre-2014)

Similarly, Zena saw a need and trusted in her ability to do something about it. "I taught intermediate. I could see a lot of the intermediate kids going to high school, not doing very well, and I thought, 'How can I help them?' I never had issues with behaviour in my classroom" (Pre-2014). Zena responded by becoming a specialist teacher, and focusing on students in secondary school.

As experienced teachers and mid-career professionals, participants were strong in their beliefs and confident in their ability to bring about change. They often came to specialist teaching with firm ideas of how the role might look. Many participants spoke directly of their sense of agency and the ways they actively fought back against aspects of the role that did not fit with their strengths, beliefs or mission.

I am a [specialist teacher], I love being a [specialist teacher], but I am a [specialist teacher] in *my* way. Yes, there are certain things I have to follow, and certain processes, and that's fine ... but there are also times when I fully intend to dig my heels in and say, 'No, I'm not doing that bit' or 'I am not accepting no to that' or something like that. (Hannah, Pre-2015)

For others, agency involved looking around the team and identifying the particular gap they might fill. Mia had just shifted offices when we first met. In her previous office, there were more experienced Māori specialist teachers who she believed were already filling the cultural needs of the centre. In the new office, she was the only Māori specialist teacher. Seeing a gap in cultural skills and knowledge, she jumped in to fill it.

I'm new there and ... I've already spoken to them at a team meeting and said, 'I'm very aware that there needs to be cultural aspects in the team because you haven't had that.' I'm instigating a lot of cultural things within my team and just integrating myself into the team and the way things are done. I'm thoroughly enjoying it because I've got a lot of freedom to do things and express how I feel about things where last year was a little bit

different because there were very experienced [Māori specialist teachers] in my team. [Last year] I was in the role of the learner. (Pre-2014)

Mia's narrative highlights the ways teachers' positioning can reciprocally influence their stance, stamina and fulfilment. In her previous role, positioning herself as having less to contribute, Mia struggled to maintain her stamina and fulfilment. In the new context, Mia's growing cultural stance empowered her to identify and address a need within the team. Developing her own and others' professional capability in this way fortified her stamina and provided her with a sense of fulfilment she had not experienced in the previous team.

At the level of the macrosystem, teaching is frequently positioned as a stressful job (Timms et al., 2007) and this may negatively impact the attrition and wellbeing of teachers. The effects may be heightened in the current education context, where diverse learners continue to be framed as an additional burden (e.g. Garrick, 2017) and as requiring a skill set beyond what teachers receive in teacher education (e.g. Page & Davis, 2016). The findings from the present study suggest that shifting the lens – celebrating the rewards of difficult casework and how much is learned from striving to reach all learners, for example – may impact on teachers' wellbeing and fulfilment as well.

Running alongside these paradigmatic struggles is the discourse around work/life balance. Participants varied in the degrees to which they integrated or compartmentalised work from other aspects of their lives. Every participant noted their struggle to do the job they believed needed to be done in the time allotted, especially when this was often above and beyond their formal job description. Their dilemmas may be influenced by discourses that frame teaching and work as separate from the rest of teachers' lives, exemplified by reports that teachers "remained highly committed to their work, despite its intrusion into their own time" or noting that "school authorities [need] to appreciate the intrusive nature of time demands on teachers' private lives" (Timms et al., 2007, p. 582). Again, considering the ways positioning influences our wellbeing, identity and practice, findings from the present study indicate that a more balanced discussion is needed. Whilst it is important to note

the ways work overflows into other areas of life, and technology increases the time spent focused on work, it may be more important to unpack how the hours were spent rather than how many hours were spent. When this group of specialist teachers focused on integration rather than balance – doing a bit of work in the evening but having a coffee with a colleague who was also a friend during the workday – they found greater fulfilment in their roles and in their lives (Morris & Madsen, 2007). They noted the extent to which their social, emotional, and community needs were being met at work.

To navigate their roles within conflicting paradigms of education and work/life balance, themes from the present study suggest the importance of specialist teachers being clear and vocal in their own positioning. In this way, they situate themselves in the biographical context of their lives and make explicit where they stand, where they belong, what they choose and how their positioning reveals their stance (Kelchtermans, 2008).

Intensification and tensions as opportunities

Participants described tensions in their roles, including pressures to work in ways that did not sit comfortably with them, along with workloads, job descriptions and policies that prevented them from doing the work they believed needed to be done (Focus Group, 2015). They worried that going along with the status quo would lead to burnout, and that fighting back in every instance might do the same. Participants chose to work with, rather than against, some policies; this might not be their priority battle, or they were new to the team and did not want to make waves. Stacked up over time, however, they worried that too many compromises would erode their stance and stamina and put their fulfilment at risk (Focus Group, 2015).

Additionally, every participant identified at least one professional pressure they felt obligated to resist (Focus Group, 2015). Their fight back strategy was typically to continue working in ways they believed to be effective in spite of pressure to do otherwise. At times this was done 'out loud', for example, actively challenging or requesting exemptions from policies such as casework timeframes. At other times, participants resisted quietly or "sneakily got around it" (Zena, Pre-2014), for example

purchasing resources with their own money to avoid what they saw as a convoluted funding approval process (Lola, Post-2014; Kirsten, Focus Group, 2015; Finella, Focus Group, 2015). Either way, they considered and crafted a unique role (Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, & Berg, 2013) that drew on and lifted their stance, and enabled their most authentic and effective practice.

When Zena was prohibited from doing home visits as part of her specialist teaching role, she encountered such a 'choice point' (David, 2016). She could let it go, and find another way to connect with families/whānau, or she could resist a policy she saw as interfering with a critical component of her practice. Zena chose to fight back. She met with her manager, discussed and validated their safety concerns, and assured them that she would keep herself safe by meeting at McDonald's when going into a particular home seemed unwise. But she would not give up home visits. Zena's manager acquiesced, and Zena continued to connect with families/whānau in their homes. Facing a tension she saw as critical, and using her stance as a moral compass of sorts, Zena navigated the tension in a way that was consistent with her belief system.

The ways participants came to understand tensions were an essential aspect of this cycle. The specialist teachers with sustained fulfilment in their roles approached tensions differently. Firstly, they acknowledged that there would always be tensions in the role; viewing their long-term roles in this way seemed to support specialist teachers to work with tensions rather than fighting against them. Moreover, they viewed tensions as opportunities to live out their values (Chang, 2014; David, 2016). As tensions are subjective, participants saw them as signalling a clash between their values and some aspect of the current situation. Like Zena, when they used these choice points (David, 2016) to craft their practice in ways that felt authentic, they increased their long-term wellbeing and fulfilment.

Participants may identify with the teachers in Kelchtermans and Ballet's (2008) study who did not perceive intensification as a negative experience. For teachers in both studies, intensified environments could be restoried as fertile spaces for proactive and creative responses. Lola and Hannah argued that their best learning came from their most difficult casework, hence their preference for long-term involvement with

complex cases involving challenging behaviour. Hannah negotiated a bespoke role within her service, taking on the most difficult work but without the pressure of timeframes, as a way of making the role her own.

Participants worried that popular notions of wellbeing could get in the way of long-term fulfilment, with their connotation of pulling back from conflict, increasing boundaries and avoiding difficult discussions (Focus Group, 2015). They believed that choosing 'safe and familiar' in response to intensification dampened their own sense of wellbeing and fulfilment. The literature supports their concern, noting that "sticking to routine-like tasks usually leads to an uncritical attitude towards one's work and a state in which new innovations cannot arise" (Collin et al., 2008, p. 197). Thus what is new, and initially more difficult, can ultimately be the most satisfying. This reframing of intensification as a potentially positive experience makes sense in terms of teacher wellbeing, as it shifts teachers from being 'executors of other people's decisions' (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 48) to being agents actively creating the systems in which they best function. This powerful interpretation is often missing from discussions on the current pressures on teachers, but was clearly reflected in these participants' accounts of practising fiercely.

The teachers in the present study indicated that burnout comes not from the tensions themselves, but from a lack of hope that the future will be better, and a sense of powerlessness over the tensions. As discussed earlier, Kirsten was discouraged by work spread across a large geographic patch, far from her home, and a workload that had her leaving and returning home in darkness. Having requested schools closer to her home, and being turned down, Kirsten was worried things would never change. "It was a very long day. ... I have done the same thing all week. Every day this week has been the same as yesterday. ... I thought, 'I don't think I can do this.'" (Kirsten, Pre-2015). She eventually transferred to a different workplace.

In summary, tensions are inevitable. Pushed up against "the boundaries of [our] abilities where [we have] a choice: self-protection and stagnation, or growth" (Bullough, 2005, p. 35), this group of specialist teachers practised fiercely in order to grow. Zena carved out a role with the secondary students and systems her colleagues

were less comfortable with, while Hannah did the same with her long-term complex casework. In both cases, practising fiercely was about acknowledging tensions, and viewing them as a chance to act out their lives in ways that fitted best for them.

Their stories foregrounded the importance of meaning-making and how each person constructed wellbeing and handled the tensions in their lives. Viewing tensions as active opportunities to take a stand, and live out one's values, was a critical component of long-term fierce and fulfilling practice.

The 'expert model' as a major tension; three circles of evidence as an alternative

As discussed in Chapter 4, one way every participant positioned themselves, which both supported and required their fierce practice, was in their disavowal of the expert model. For them, the construct was problematic in its assumption of one right answer, connotations of self-reliance and privileging of certain team members and professional groups as having the answer. Above all, this group of specialist teachers rejected the burden of being seen as an expert, as the ensuing power imbalances could interfere with genuine collaboration (Focus Group, 2015).

However, participants believed they continued to be positioned as experts, especially by families/whānau. In response, Ruth and others actively reframed themselves in ways that redistributed the power to families as the people who knew their situation the best.

We have all kinds of questions from families all of the time. We can give a perspective, but it is not *the* answer because we only know a little bit about the lives of these families. Some of the things we are asked are really not in our field, but because of our lived experiences we can have input into them. Because we work in a transdisciplinary way we do know a little bit about a lot of different ... but it is not necessarily *the* answer for that whānau and that child because we don't know. (Ruth, Post-2014)

Practising fiercely stretched participants' skills as they pushed the boundaries of their own competence. Working in interprofessional teams, they questioned how much

knowledge was enough before they could contribute in areas typically outside their brief. Ruth resolved a particular dilemma by sharing her knowledge, but in a way that reinforced her sense of interprofessional practice as lifelong learning rather than what she saw as the finite connotation of *expert*.

Because there are so many facets to the role of teaching – wherever you are, not just special ed, but particularly in special ed – there are always lots of areas where you don't know you don't know. So once you know you don't know, that's one thing; you are aware and so you can find out. When you *don't know* you don't know, that is one of the reasons why I guess I struggle with 'expert'. It is not a narrow field; it's really wide if you take a holistic approach. ... So seeing yourself as an expert is a dangerous thing in this field. ...

I will give you an example of a child recently who I could see was aspirating. That child has been in the hospital four times in the last two months and nearly died. And the family were not aware that when a child's eyes well up, that means they are aspirating. I fed in that information and the mother was talking to the nurse: 'Why didn't you tell me this stuff and I hear it from a teacher!?' Some of the things that we know can make a big difference in a life, but it doesn't mean it is the same for the next child that wells up because they are crying. So I think presenting [our journey as not having] a fixed [beginning or end], whereas 'expert' to me is like 'it stops here'. (Ruth, Post-2014)

However, whilst this group of specialist teachers renounced the expert model, it continued to cast a shadow over their learning and professional practice.

Paradoxically, participants still commented on not feeling 'expert enough'. Measuring their practice against an unseen, higher performing other tapped into lingering fears that others had more expertise, that they themselves were still not quite good enough.

In a postgraduate course predicated on professionals *learning with, from and about* each other (Specialist Teaching Programme Handbook, 2016), there is an emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge and the importance of learning in a community.

Knowing this, Belinda's self-doubt still prevented her from engaging in the online forums. "I didn't like participating in the forums last year because ... I didn't think I was academic enough. I didn't think what I had to share was really of any value" (Pre-2014). Belinda's extensive field experience didn't match her notion of expertise. And, while she rejected the expert model in her own practice, it coloured her perception of her peers. "Some of them are working with very, very complex kids whereas I might have fifteen kids in the class with multiple diagnoses. So ... even though it's kids with complex needs, I wasn't complex enough" (Pre-2014). Like the teachers in Bullough's (2005) study, Belinda and others were afraid to reveal their own doubts and failings when in the company of other 'experts' they perceived as 'having it all together'.

It was Belinda's final marks that validated her expertise, which unfortunately underscored the idea that expert status is ascribed by others: "Oh, I actually passed. Maybe I do know what I'm doing! (Belinda, Post-2014). Like Friend, who believed she needed the qualification "to reassure myself that I am good enough or qualified" (Friend, Pre-2014), participants sometimes looked to more experienced professionals for certainty, rather than critiquing the very idea of certainty.

This notion of expert had far-reaching effects on these participants, impacting their wellbeing, stamina and fulfilment, especially with its links to perfection. Whilst they acknowledged the impossible task of knowing and doing everything, there was ambivalence in this acknowledgement (Focus Group, 2015). In terms of study, "if an [assignment deadline] has been set, then as an adult you should be able to manage your time and be able to meet those expectations. And if you can't, ... well there must be a pretty good damn reason why you can't" (Lola, Post-2014). In and out of hospital several times during study, Zena still did not accept offers of extensions. "Getting sick made me even more determined to finish [the study] because I didn't want my sickness to be an excuse why I couldn't finish it" (Zena, Post-2014).

As a natural extension of this, participants did not want to ask for help as they regarded this as revealing their vulnerabilities. For Lola, the barrier she labelled "my non-willingness ... to ask for help" was because she "saw it as a weakness if I was asking for help, because it meant that I couldn't do it myself, which is a weakness"

(Post-2014). Lola acknowledged that her reticence effectively “stops me growing as much as I can” (Lola, Post-2014) and left the programme without graduating shortly after this interview.

Sam related this reticence back to the culture of teaching in schools. “I think teachers ... still operate in isolation. ... There is almost a culture of, not secrecy, but you don’t like people to see you fail” (Sam, Pre-2014). Her insights align with Bullough’s assertion that “some teachers seek to make themselves invulnerable, immune to the possibility of failing” (2005, p. 23), which limits their development, practice and sense of community. A vicious cycle is created, where outside appearances belie common vulnerabilities and hinder professionals’ ability to affirm and support one another. Teachers may also lose the risk-taking, unpredictability in relationships and learning from failure that is often “a source of much that is delightful and inspiring about teaching” (Bullough, 2005, p. 25).

Sam intentionally moved away from this way of thinking and being as a specialist teacher. Still, she struggled to ask for extensions in her postgraduate study, in spite of legitimate, ongoing medical issues. “You don’t ... want to be that student that is always sick and always asking for deadline extensions” (Pre-2014). Finella professed this as well: “I have a problem with asking for help. ... I find it really hard, I feel like everybody had graduated with honours ... and I am just kind of like ‘Yay’ if I pass” (Post-2015).

Shadows of the expert model prevented people from asking for help, but also from turning down other people’s requests for help. Kirsten felt she needed to meet everyone else’s needs at the expense of her own, and this idea was reinforced by her colleagues. “One time I had to say no, and that was really hard for me because saying no to people just doesn’t come easy to me, especially when they are asking for help” (Post-2015). Kirsten’s reply met with a negative reaction; this really affected her, as she viewed her role as meeting the needs of others. “The first time I said no, I realised how hard it was for them to hear it, because that person didn’t speak to me for a week. ... Being able to say no was good for me in some ways but not good in other ways” (Kirsten, Post-2015).

Practising fiercely pushes the limits of one's competence. Specialist teachers may need to learn to live with discomfort, embracing the tensions and acknowledging the inherent vulnerabilities that come with practising as a teacher. David considered this part of showing up, or "get[ting] comfortable with being uncomfortable" (2016, p. 80).

Working within the three circles of evidence as an alternate professional pathway

Propelled by their discomfort with the expert model, and by extension with a linear pathway from novice to expert (Focus Group, 2014), participants looked for new ways to measure their growing competency. This group of specialist teachers saw themselves at the centre of complex situations, sifting evidence alongside others and designing custom-fit supports for children, families/whānau, teachers and systems. A critical feature of their work was interprofessional practice, which Ruth described as working more and more widely, knowing a little bit about a lot of things and knowing where to go for more information in ever-increasing communities of practice (Post-2014).

As mentioned in the literature review, Specialist Teaching students are introduced to evidence-based practice as the intersection of three circles of evidence – the research evidence; professional wisdom, and the voice of children, families/whānau and schools (Bourke et al, 2005; Bourke & Loveridge, 2013; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013). Participants viewed this evidence-based practice framework, where their own expertise was only one circle, as one way of ensuring co-constructed interventions and outcomes. They contrasted this approach with an expert model which they viewed as more directly influencing the direction and outcomes of work with children and families/whānau (Focus Group, 2014). Lola (Post-2014) contrasted these two ways of working in her example of co-working with a colleague viewed as an expert within their office.

We have a group of ten dyslexic boys and they are all having reading issues. [My colleague] is very academic and doesn't have great people skills whereas I feel like I am a bit of the reverse, so we are actually co-working that case. So I am sitting down with the boys and using my colleague's strategies to come up with things that are working for the boys.

... Instead of just saying 'these are the great strategies', I talked to my colleague about can we perhaps get the boys to choose a couple of strategies that they would like to implement in their own learning. ... The teachers already know a lot of information; it is just that some strategies are not working for some of these particular boys. So I just thought if we show the boys what some strategies are, perhaps they could choose one or two to try and implement in their own learning and get the teachers and parents to support them in that. If it is not working, then fine: pick and choose some other ones, but try to give them more control in their learning. [My colleague] was very much 'these are strategies that work very well for dyslexic kids' but for some of them, they have secondary issues. It is not all about the dyslexia. The boys didn't like to talk to him so much because he is very much that quiet academic, whereas I am very much the boisterous kind of loud one. So, once again, it is very much getting in who you need for the children.

Through time and reflective practice, specialist teachers learnt to synthesise the three circles of evidence in order to co-construct tailored solutions for referral issues. Along the way, and with increasing confidence, they adapted research-supported practices in ways that maintained the integrity of the intervention whilst responding to the unique variables of the current situation. They learned to stand strong in their collaborative processes, their individual contributions, and the results of their involvement. Their increasing integration of the three circles of evidence suggests that this framework may serve as an alternative professional progression.

Bella (Pre-2014), the youngest participant in the study, was newer to the process of integrating different sources of evidence. As part of a conversation about bridging university learning with actual practice situations, Bella shared an example of acting in a way that balanced all of her knowledge:

We would always say in class how it is important for parents to speak to their own children in their own language. I've met parents that, when their child started at kindergarten ... would only speak to the child in English.

They spoke Chinese until the child was about three and then they just switched because they thought that the child wouldn't understand anything. Through my experiences, because I'm bilingual as well, it's actually okay for you to speak to your child in their own language. Then, when they come to kindergarten, they can be immersed in the English speaking environment. I thought it was really cool. I gave them different articles and research as well and had a really good talk. ... [As a result] they just changed back to speaking Chinese with the child. (Pre-2014)

This example demonstrated her integration of personal wisdom/lived experience with professional wisdom and confidence. When asked why she chose this example, Bella explained, "It felt like it was an achievement for the parents as well as for the child. If I didn't intervene, then the child would probably have lost their heritage language and probably struggled with their cultural identity. It could lead onto a lot of problems" (Pre-2014).

The participants in this study leaned more heavily on one circle of evidence, and tended to develop their use of all three circles in a predictable sequence. They often begin with a focus on the research, for privileging the literature over client voice or devaluing their own lived wisdom in ways that mirror the wider society's reification of research evidence. Then, in line with the current emphasis on collaboration and student voice, specialist teachers shift to add the child/family/teachers' perspectives as legitimate evidence.

Drawing on this third circle of evidence requires skill and intention. Zena (Post-2014) believed this was why professionals often recognised authentic practice best in hindsight, when they could reflect on the active participation of each participant and note the ways each voice shaped the final outcome. Along these lines, Mia shared her example of evidence-based practice, where getting the father involved signalled to her that her work had been authentic.

I think if I was to take a case [as an example of evidence-based practice], [it would be] my behaviour case with a Pasifika student and his whānau. When I first took up the case, Dad didn't want to have anything to do with

the child and the case so Mum was the person that I dealt with. Then as the case went through the motions and I did the [collaborative action plan] and did a behaviour plan, suddenly I set up a meeting with Mum and she said, 'Dad's coming ... he actually wants to meet you'. He said, 'I really need to thank you for the work that you have done for my son.' ... This is the most amazing thing because he has never been interested in anything to do with the child ever; he lets the Mum do everything. Incredible. And I just looked at this and thought, 'Now this is exactly what my practice should be about: slowly working on building relationships and building trust with the Mum and the Mum talking to the Dad and the Dad thinking I really need to meet this lady because I see changes in my son. That is when I think, 'Oh my gosh, everything was worth it'. (Mia, Post-2014)

Legitimising craft knowledge through the second circle

It is the second circle – professional wisdom – which seems to come last, and with which the specialist teachers in this study struggled the most. Initially they downplayed their lived experience and some struggled to see their own circle of evidence on par with the research evidence. As one illustration, despite over a decade of varied teaching experiences, Belinda (Pre-2014) began postgraduate study “to have knowledge ... to talk from a point of view of knowledge rather than hearsay, ... stuff that I've heard people say, and gut instinct.” Throughout the course, they learned to value their lived experience and intuition as critical sources of knowledge. Sam described the specific ways her professional identity was strengthened by integrating these sources of knowledge.

Part of it is having much stronger evidence based bedrock to work from. Even if I don't actually know it, I know where to go and find it now. I think I started off this course doing a lot of things going on my gut – my instinct, personal experience – but I didn't really have the knowledge behind it. When you have got that, you are much more confident at choosing approaches and looking at what has been done and the evidence suggests and you can always adapt it. [Having the] mixture ... has given me a much greater sense of confidence and professionalism. ... I do [keep space for my

gut instinct] and I still think that's what ... determines my approach once I get a sense of the person I am [going] to work with. (Sam, Post-2014)

For Sam, a non-Māori professional, honouring her own second circle of evidence was most apparent in her growing confidence as an advocate for effective bicultural practice. She noted that she has “always been quite committed to bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand but I haven't really had the tools to articulate it with confidence” (Post-2015).

I didn't feel I had the right or ability to talk to anything about Māori at all. And yet ... [in] some of the environments that I have worked in, I was really unhappy with how it was being taught and addressed. I didn't have the confidence or ability to say [anything]. Now I have ... the literature [from this postgraduate course on teaching] and ... some really good phrases that I can use ... to prompt people 'Are we doing this?' 'Are we looking at this?' 'How are we particularly teaching our students as Māori, so they are succeeding as Māori not as brown Pākehā?' I have the confidence to challenge people on that. (Sam, Post-2015)

Even as they learned to value their lived experience, an additional challenge was including their *personal* lived experience as part of this. Participants frequently cited extensive personal experiences with inclusion and exclusion. Additionally, several of the participants had been involved with special education specifically, as a student or as a parent. People often have personal reasons for working in special or inclusive education, and it was no different for this group. Their experiences often brought them into the profession and shaped their career pathways. Ruth, for instance, chose her specific branch of specialist teaching after losing a family member with related needs. “I have some empathy with families. Obviously, I don't know what it's like as a parent to have a child with a [specific impairment] but I do know what it's like as a family member” (Pre-2014).

In general terms, the majority of participants spoke of bringing the personal to the professional. “It has to be a personal thing. ... In the jobs that we do, if you are just straight down the line very professional, you miss the heartbeat of it, and that's

necessary for our students” (Hannah, Pre-2015). However, even after beginning to view their former professional experiences as legitimate sources of evidence, it took time to see their personal experience as an asset as well. Friend and Sam, for example, were parents to children with significant learning needs. Both worked in the strand of inclusive education most directly related to their own children. In spite of this, Friend sometimes felt like an imposter.

Friend: My kids are the reason that I came into this line of work ...

Professionally, I like my job; it certainly stepped me out of my comfort zone. Sometimes I feel like I am not quite good enough or not quite there. ...

Wendy: When you say that you are not quite there do you have a picture in your head of what ‘there’ would look like?

Friend: That would be a good thing to have. I don’t know that I do. Maybe getting my [certification] would make me feel like I was there. I guess at the moment that’s what I see as being there. ... I think probably it’s just confidence. ... Yes, maybe that would help me to really feel like I was there. ... Sometimes I [feel like I] kind of sneaked in through the back door as a parent, which I have been told is not the case, but I guess a degree, that certificate, might make me feel like okay, I really am [a professional].

(Friend, Post-2014)

Ultimately, they integrated the three circles of evidence and saw the value of their personal and professional wisdom in this regard. Sam, for example, increasingly valued her own insider-outsider perspective: “I know the struggles that I have had as a parent and I am from within the system. I would really like to help parents make those connections on to the professionals” (Post-2015). When asked how families/whānau would describe her, she said she hoped “they will recognise me as someone who has got experience backed up with knowledge” (Sam, Post-2015).

One parent described it to me as ‘Oh, you’re on the [specific disability] team, because you’re one of us, because I’m a parent of somebody with

[specific disability]. He said it made a real difference to be talking to someone who 'speaks our language'. Which I haven't really thought about until he said that but it is true ... [I'd like to be described as] 'One of us' – I suppose. (Sam, Post-2015)

There are several possible explanations for professional wisdom entering the sequence in this way. Perhaps the specialist teachers in this study conflated *expertise* with *expert* and so avoided both. Or, perhaps positivist pressures in education have had the inadvertent effect of dampening professionals' belief in their own intuition. Possibly for a combination of reasons, it was professionals' craft knowledge which took the longest to develop and integrate within the whole of evidence-based practice. Ruth, for example, noted "When we first start, I don't think we realise that our lived experience is quite valuable, or that going with our gut, our guts are quite valuable" (Post-2014). She explained the changed way she framed evidence-based practice:

There is all this research, and I can say things that are evidence-based, but I have also come to value my experiences or my gut. ... I see it a certain way because of who I am and where I have been. (Post-2014)

Florian and Graham (2014), drawing on Cooper and McIntyre's (1995) work, define craft knowledge as that which is gained through experience, reflection and skilled problem-solving. In their discussion of phronesis, they describe the "role of the teacher as a thinker, interpreter of social norms and decision-maker, someone who can sensitively exercise professional judgements while simultaneously making sense of complex social and practical situations" (Florian & Graham, 2014, p. 475). Findings from the present study echoed these understandings of craft knowledge, and reiterated the importance of professionals working at the centre of multi-sourced evidence. Following on from Bourke and Loveridge's work, the present study confirmed the reciprocal benefits of evidence-based practice conceived in this way and provided concrete examples of participants supporting others whilst developing "both the rigour and artistry of their practice (Bourke & Loveridge, 2013).

Knowing and not knowing

As participants developed their professional wisdom, and their confidence with evidence-based practice, they seemed to grow more comfortable with the lack of certainty that comes with genuinely co-constructing with others. As they elicited the voice of the child and family/whānau, they were cognisant that what has worked for other children might not work for this one. As they developed their knowledge of literature and theory, they understood that there might be more useful research than that which they had consulted. Ironically then, for this group of specialist teachers developing their expertise was based on a stance of not knowing as much as knowing.

Practising fiercely in this way necessitates trusting the process enough to avoid driving the outcomes, which can be tricky in an education context participants saw as working to recast them in an expert role. As shared in Chapter 4, Sam repeatedly clarified her role as ‘genuinely grappling in the dark’ (post-2015) with others, rather than walking in with the answers. Like Sam, and in contrast to what they saw as the certitude presupposed by an expert approach, specialist teachers needed to bring both certainty and uncertainty to their casework. Knowing no one person had the answers, participants reached out to others. Working at the centre of the three circles thus exemplifies relational agency, whereby “collaborative practice involves resourceful use of the expertise of others and aligning one’s professional practice with that of others” (Edwards, 2005, p. 178).

The findings in the present study are consistent with Edwards’ claim that co-working professionals share and expand their understandings, bring to bear increased resources, and align their work with respect to their collective expertise. According to Edwards, specialist teachers’ willingness to move into areas of uncertainty, and away from their “professional shelters” (p. 180) and strict procedural expertise, strengthens their practice in unpredictable situations they are not prepared for. Arguably, because the three circles of evidence are unique in each situation, working at their intersection is by definition unpredictable and co-constructing a way forward is where the magic lies. The superordinate skill seemed to be collaboration or “know[ing] how to know who” (Edwards, 2005, p. 178).

In summary, Bourke, Curzon and Holden (2005) changed the conversation in education in Aotearoa New Zealand about what counts as evidence, and further developed the conversation to detail the importance of a systematic review of the literature as part of that process (Bourke and Loveridge, 2013). The present study makes a contribution as well, exploring the three circles of evidence as a professional pathway and fleshing out the second circle, whereby professionals learn to value, stretch and apply their own craft knowledge as a legitimate source of evidence.

Job crafting

In the same way positioning details the ways specialist teachers framed their practice, job crafting illustrates the ways they co-created their roles as part of practising fiercely. *Job crafting*, an idea introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton in 2001, involves the intentional co-constructing of one's role – at the levels of tasks, relationships and purpose – to shape the nature and personal significance of the work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). In education, job crafting has been linked to both agency and wellbeing (Peral & Geldenhuys, 2016). Job crafting supports professionals to co-create a role that “allow[s] for more expression of their values, motivations, or beliefs [and] is likely to have a direct impact on the positive meaning of their work by creating a sense of alignment between the self and the work” (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013, p. 289). In this way, job crafting enables the enacted professional identity that is stance.

In line with their growing self-understanding, the specialist teachers in the present study grew their awareness of their contexts and the ways they might shape those contexts. Empowered by their age and stage, these specialist teachers then sought to negotiate the terms of their work. Hannah questioned whether newer educators could do this, arguing that experience earned specialist teachers the right to reframe their roles.

As you grow into the role ... you [also] bring your experience. ... I don't think the role of [specialist teacher] should be ... taken on by people who haven't had some life experience. ... It's a very hard role to do if you haven't got that experience. ... You need to [have been] in the classroom,

you should have done some sort of a management role or leadership role.

... You need the experience to be able to go in and say to a teacher, 'Yes, I know he is hard ... yes, I stood in your shoes'. (Hannah, Pre-2015)

To increase their impact and fulfilment, each participant tailored their role to include the components of authentic practice they deemed to be essential (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Mia worked around casework timelines as part of her unwavering commitment to building relationships, and to seeing the child and whānau as inseparable.

I'm a relationship builder. Relationships take time, and often having that time limit of 28, 30 weeks, it's so hard for me to imagine. ... Any time management doesn't understand the importance of ... relationship building, it's a barrier. Absolutely. You have to have that within that cultural model. There has to be time for that. If you don't have that *whanaungatanga* (relationship building) in there, it will not work, it will fall apart, it'll be fragmented and it will take a lot longer. If you're on the same page at the beginning and know that this may take a little bit longer ... in the end, the child will benefit. ... Really, it's looking after the child, the tamariki. That's who we're working for. And the *whānau* (family) are the *tamariki*. People don't realise that the whānau are the tamariki, you cannot separate the two. If the whānau aren't happy, you will not get anywhere. (Post-2014)

Stance involved *finding* settings that were a good match and *creating* settings that were a good match. Armed with self-understanding, participants looked for contexts that matched their ideals. They appreciated the mutually constitutive ways their context shaped them as they shaped their context. Finella was fortunate, in that she worked in an office where her agency and individual ways of working were supported by management. As long as she achieved positive outcomes within a reasonable amount of time, she was allowed to work in the ways she deemed to be most effective. This often included working above and beyond the role, for example, driving

children to school, getting breakfast on the way and taking parents to medical appointments (Post-2015).

Ruth's stance led her to a new setting, one where "relationships with families came first and I thought this was a place that had beliefs and values that sat with mine" (Ruth, Pre-2014). In contrast with Ruth's early childhood setting, Belinda took on a role in secondary where parental involvement wasn't actively prioritised. Rather than find a new context, Belinda worked to shift her current context to align with her strong belief in home-school partnerships. She described one small way she changed the way things were done in her setting, as an example of crafting her role.

With parent interviews last night, at the end of every one I said, 'Don't forget, just email me if there's anything,' and I said to them that I'll do the same. I describe it as triangulation, where we're all working together. It's their kid, I'm the teacher and then there's the student. It's important that the parents feel empowered to have a voice if they're unhappy about something. I think, especially when people have got kids with special needs as well, they feel that they've fought their whole entire life. They've been connected to it all their whole lives, too. Secondary can be quite scary, and I think it's about making that easy for them as well. (Belinda, Post-2014)

Stance draws on professionals' increasing understanding and development of their beliefs, values and motivations. When they can then create spaces for these attributes within the workplace, their professional practice becomes more meaningful (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013).

Job crafting aligns with Edwards' (2005) notion of relational agency. Conceptualised as an "enhanced version of professionalism" (p. 179), it goes beyond traditional notions of professional development as increasingly adopting existing practices. In relational agency, as with stance, professionals are co-creating their roles as they are learning them.

Professional learning should not simply be a matter of induction into established practices; though induction into values and key skills is important. It also needs to

include a capacity for interpreting and approaching problems, for contesting interpretations, for reading the environment, for drawing on the resources there, for being a resource for others, for focusing on the core objects of the professions (p. 179).

Teachers in the present study confirmed these ideas. They continually refined their roles to blend their strengths and needs with organisational requirements and the specific ways they hoped to contribute to the education sector. With a growing appreciation of their own skills and the practices they found the most meaningful, participants increasingly fought to incorporate these elements into their core duties. When they did this effectively, for instance Mia establishing herself as a cultural leader in the office, they found tangible ways of enacting their stance. According to participants, this had a direct influence on their fulfilment.

By bringing a job crafting perspective to bear, job designs are no longer construed as a static source of constraint and top-down control, but rather, a starting place – or a partially blank canvas – from which employees can alter the content of their jobs in ways that cultivate a positive sense of meaning and identity in their work. (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013, p. 287)

Whether they sought to integrate or compartmentalise aspects of their lives, for instance, keeping work separate from family life, every participant wanted to develop and present an integrated self across roles. This fits with Wrzesniewski and colleagues' (2013) discussion of positive work identity, which includes being virtuous, esteemed, progressive and integrated. Similar to their participants, specialist teachers in the present study sought to incorporate their virtues and values; represent a workplace that was highly regarded; have a dynamic sense of self, and express themselves in coherent ways across all of their roles.

Solberg and Wong (2016) challenged the notion that employee agency is sufficient for job crafting, noting the additional need for supportive contexts. Their study demonstrated that job crafting works best in situations in which “employees’ perceived adaptivity was high and leaders’ need for structure was low” (p. 8). Like Solberg and Wong (2016), the present study affirmed the need for a strong stance

accompanied by organisational systems which allowed specialist teachers to flexibly enact their stance. When management supported job crafting, participants were more able to incorporate nourishing practices within the workday. The participants in the present study noted the positive impact of personalised role definition on their stamina and wellbeing. But, even when management did not support them in reshaping their roles, the specialist teachers resisted either by doing it anyway (a job on top of their official job) or by leaving.

Unfortunately, in the present education context, crafting one's role is not always encouraged or even allowed. Whilst job crafting is linked with job satisfaction, there is a mediating effect of perceived organisational support (Ingusci, Callea, Chirumbolo, & Urbini, 2016). At the organisational level, barriers to job crafting include role overload, unmanageable workloads, isolation, and micro-managing structures (Solberg & Wong, 2016). The present research affirmed these barriers, and demonstrated the negative influence on participants' fulfilment and stamina when strict and rigid policies prohibited them from making the job their own. Several participants worked in highly structured roles, pre-determined by management and with little room for individual improvisation. Like teachers in a recent Australian study (Garrick et al, 2017), the participants in this study noted limited opportunities or support for professional development outside of their formal postgraduate study. They also reported that specific professional development was supported when it aligned with management's vision rather than their own. As mentioned earlier, Katie advocated for the ability to enhance and utilise her counselling skills in her specialist teaching role. Prohibited from both, she left the job and is no longer working as a specialist teacher.

Job crafting is not an either/or proposition; at different times in different contexts, the ability to craft one's job will vary. For the sake of their stamina, participants needed to stay realistic and humble. They understood they could not have it all their own way and needed stay open to new learning: there may be better ways of working, and there was always more to know. Each participant determined their own formula: the balance of resilience and resistance (Margolis et al., 2014) most likely to be fulfilling. They needed to systematically reflect that which they viewed as critical, for instance, time to establish relationships with families/whānau, and fight for those practices. For

the sake of their stamina, they needed to act in ways that were consistent with their stance but within reason. They could not fight every fight, which would be a recipe for burnout. But neither could they always go with the flow, for the sake of 'going along to get along', which could have been a recipe for burnout as well.

Much of the research on job crafting focuses on the individual; however, Leana, Appelbaum and Shevchuk (2009) extended the focus to collaborative crafting, noting the links to high quality work, commitment to the organisation and job satisfaction. Leana et al. (2009) found that collective job crafting increased in groups that had interdependence; discretion; strong social ties; supervision, and in roles they saw as a calling rather than a career. Belinda and Ruth met with their respective teams each day, to share and refine practice. Lola upskilled others in technology, which led the team to think about how they might all use technology to support their practice. Both of these examples illustrate the ways participants in a community of practice can craft their roles collectively. As an extension of this, interprofessional practice sets the stage for, and inspires, collective job crafting. Working across disciplines, the specialist teachers in this research identified overlaps and points of difference in their roles, as they developed a shared language and useful networks. They developed both professional and interprofessional identities as part of work that increasingly blurred traditional boundaries of practice.

In their 2013 summary of the evolution of job crafting research, Wrzesniewski et al. noted that empirical studies of job crafting have identified important antecedents and outcomes, whereby job crafting has positively impacted the individual and the organisation in a range of ways; still "little theory or research has directly examined job crafting as a mechanism for employees to cultivate a positive sense of meaning and identity in work over time" (p. 287). Yet, these authors continue, meaning and identity might be central to *why* individuals craft their jobs and how this benefits them over time. My research has extended the conversation, by exploring the ways stance and stamina, predicated on enacting one's professional identity in ways that work for self and others over time, led to fulfilment in specialist teaching roles. Participants connected their ability to shape aspects of their work to fit with their stance as directly related to their fulfilment, and specified the ways negotiating the extent of their job

crafting impacted their stamina. Critically, job crafting helped them navigate the inevitable tensions in the current inclusive education context. Bringing themselves to their work in these tailored ways lifted their agency, commitment and sense of fulfilment.

Lastly, Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) question the causal nature of identity, wondering whether it is meaning or job crafting that comes first. The present study suggests a different answer to a different question: that learning and doing, belonging and becoming, might be considered as a simultaneous and reciprocal moment. As professionals craft themselves and their workplaces, they in return are being crafted; such is the enacted nature of stance and the inextricable nature of looking inwards whilst acting outwards.

In summary, job crafting allowed specialist teachers to shape their roles to be more personally meaningful. They might, for instance, stretch timeframes to allow for relationship-building with teachers, families/whānau and students and provide significant support to the family alongside their work with the child and school. They might take it upon themselves to improve the cultural competency or digital literacy or mindfulness-based practices of their colleagues. In these ways, they went beyond their official role to create and enact roles that were meaningful for them.

In his critique of inclusive education in Aotearoa, Hornby implicates limited regulations, such as statutory training and requirements, as “glaring deficiencies in the Aotearoa New Zealand system” (2012, p. 57). The present study argues the opposite, that reduced top-down control in Aotearoa New Zealand has actually created fertile spaces for the crafting of professional roles in line with one’s values and the needs of every individual child. This group of specialist teachers consistently struggled with the high level of prescription in their roles, which they perceived as limited trust. When they were trusted and supported to craft their roles, they designed roles that promoted individual and institutional wellbeing (Margolis et al., 2014).

Resilience through resistance

Of the fourteen participants in the study, Hannah was one of the few to remain fulfilled by the specialist teaching role throughout our two years together, and one of

only a handful who remained in the role. In part, she attributed this to the specific ways she maintained her stamina, including the careful way she chose her battles. Returning to her earlier assertion,

I am a [specialist teacher], I love being a [specialist teacher] but I am a [specialist teacher] in *my* way. Yes there are certain things I have to follow and certain processes and that's fine ... but there are also times when I fully intend to dig in my heels. (Pre-2015)

Hannah's stance is consistent with research done by Margolis et al. (2014), which found that resistance is an essential component of resilience. For her, "resilience is part of the fighting back. It's part of saying 'okay, no, I will go with you that far, but I don't agree with that bit. That's not me and I can't work in that way'" (Pre-2015). She was often strident in her actions, including times when funding applications were rejected. "There was absolutely no way that I was going to accept that for an answer. ... There was no way that we were going to give in 'til he got that" and she reapplied twice, putting in "more than 150 hours" until the student received funding (Pre-2015). Hannah also worked with children and families/whānau longer than was technically allowed; "Well, the timeline I tend to ignore, to be quite honest with you" (Hannah, Post-2015)! Hannah didn't resist every policy and practice that she didn't agree with, however, as she realised this wasn't feasible. "I think you have to do balances and checks at times, and you have to accept that as a professional there will be things that you do that you may not totally believe in" (Hannah, Post-2015).

Katie (Pre-2015) also strived to craft her role in ways that fitted with her values and beliefs. She told a powerful story of going into a classroom to observe two young boys who had been referred for behaviour support. Several things bothered her, for instance, that one of the target boys was well behaved and engaged, putting his hand up appropriately to answer teacher questions, but being ignored as the teacher only called on girls. More upsetting, Katie noticed a young boy the teacher "kept picking on ... telling him all the things that he was doing wrong and everything that needed to be changed about him, his behaviour". Katie was "just horrified at the way she was treating him" but didn't feel she could do much as this was a release teacher "only in

the class one day a week ... and clearly she thinks there is absolutely nothing wrong with her practice as a very experienced teacher". She found it "really challenging" to watch the boy being treated poorly, but didn't feel she could intervene because he was not one of the students she was there to observe.

Like Hannah, Katie found resilience in a small bit of resistance, "the only way I could be true to myself and who I am and how I believe in building people up". The boy was sitting outside the door, and Katie talked to him on her way out. She asked if he had been listening to the teacher, he said "kind of" and Katie said, "I thought you were." She found out he loved sports, and shared with him "My son loves sports too, and he always gets in trouble for not sitting still. Teachers think he's not listening, but he is always listening because he is a really good listener". She asked him again if he was a good listener, and he said "Yeah". Katie reflected on him smiling as she left, and said, "I just felt that I had to do something for this boy ... and it was really tricky how I could do that and still remain in my role as an RTLB but still be true to who I am". Katie described herself as someone who "just can't leave it, that's me". Knowing this, she acted in a way that respected the constraints of her role whilst doing something she could live with.

At the final focus group (2015), three participants added a leaf to the Stamina Ketso with the word 'rebel'. Hannah explained her logic in a way that resonated with the group:

You have to be a bit of a rebel. There are ways around things and if you're not allowed to do home visits, then go and visit them at a cafe. I'm not very good at following rules ... if you're going to be genuine and you're going to be you, then there has to be a bit of a rebel in you that will bend things slightly. And if I was in a cluster that wouldn't give me that little bit of leeway, then I don't think I could work for them. (Hannah, Focus Group, 2015)

Whether they expressed their actions in fierce terms, such as 'rebel', or softer terms, participants consistently endorsed the need to make their roles their own. The group did not view resistance and resilience as mutually exclusive; and finding a satisfying

mix of the two lifted their stamina. The trust of management was critical, as their personal ways of working required latitude in executing service standards and intervention sequences.

Timms et al. (2007) defined burnout as exhaustion and disengagement, and engagement as comprised of dedication, absorption and vigour. In their research, dedication describes strong feelings toward a meaningful, challenging role; vigour involves high energy professionals want to invest in their work; and absorption is akin to flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) in its depiction of wholly absorbing tasks. Their study found negative correlations between high workloads and vigour, but positive correlations between high workloads and absorption. In other words, overloaded professionals may have difficulty building up their reserves, but could still find themselves highly occupied within their work hours (Timms et al., 2007).

Conclusion

Teacher wellbeing is of perpetual concern, and rightly so. However, the limited success of initiatives designed to bolster teacher wellbeing (Naghieh, Montgomery, Bonell, Thompson & Aber, 2015) might in part result from the ways wellbeing is framed as self-care and conflated with happiness (Kelchtermans, 2008; Seligman, 2012). Organisational supports are often premised on wellbeing as an add-on, and frequently fail to redress the imbalance between institutional and individual wellbeing (Margolis et al., 2014).

The present study shifted the conversation, interrogating how time was spent rather than the number of hours, and found it was the *nature* of the work rather than the *amount* of work that made the difference. In explaining their career choices, participants talked about the fit between their roles and their values, the meaningfulness of the work and the extent to which they could craft their roles to enact their stance. In short, participants' fulfilment was not based on how much work but rather on how much they loved the work.

Participants' particular frustration with meetings, administrative tasks and policy and practice (see also Timms et al., 2007) evidences Kelchtermans and Ballet's (2008)

critique of the intensification thesis, in which they argue that teachers can and do mediate the specific pressures put onto them. Meetings, admin and frequent policy changes are the areas where they have the least agency as they are often non-negotiable aspects of their role. The present study indicates it is this lack of power which erodes their stamina, more than the tasks themselves.

Participants responded to intensification in both their positioning and their active (re)crafting of their roles, as outlined in the framework *Practising Fiercely: Fulfilment through Stance, Supports and Stamina*. The framework foregrounds the importance of positioning, and in particular participants' desire to position themselves as having expertise without being an expert. In contrast, they storied themselves as evidence-based practitioners who increasingly drew out and integrated the voice of research, children and families/whānau with their own craft wisdom. In this way, they were able to balanced relational notions of effectiveness with their own individual/collective sense of making a difference. Alongside positioning, fulfilment was a reflection of the extent to which they could craft their roles to better reflect their stance, to better walk their why.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

This chapter zooms out to reflect on the strengths, limitations and implications of the present study. A salient feature of the study is its participatory nature, and not every researcher has the opportunity to evaluate a piece of research in real-time and alongside participants. I took this opportunity, ending my final interviews with the question “What, if any, benefits did you experience in being part of the study?” The responses of the group are shared thematically as a way of evaluating the strengths of the methodology from my own perspective as well as those of participants. Inclusion of new findings in the final chapter is not a traditional approach, but is my judgement of the structure and content that best presents this study.

Contribution of the research

There is a need for holistic research into identity which simultaneously considers beliefs, emotions, knowledge and professional development (Bukor, 2014). Additionally, research is needed on teachers’ own perspectives of interventions that might raise their occupational wellbeing (Garrick et al., 2017). In the absence of holistic definitions, and first person perspectives, we risk framing teacher fulfilment as a conduit to student outcomes and teacher retention through a fiscal lens (Darling-Hammond, 2003, 2010). When teachers are constructed narrowly as “a valuable human resource” (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 7) and “making schools more attractive and supportive places to work for staff” is linked solely to student learning outcomes (Garrick, 2017, p. 117), teacher fulfilment may be construed as a means to an end rather than an important aim in and of itself. The teachers in Garrick et al.’s (2017) study endorsed this perception, reinforcing that student performance was prioritised over their own wellbeing.

Alongside the study of identity, there is a need to consider how professional identity can be developed explicitly as part of teacher education (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). However, the dearth of research unpacking *how* identities are developed has

made it difficult to understand how teacher educators might be instrumental in the process (Mentis et al., 2016). “The more we as teacher educators can learn about the process of developing a teaching identity, the better we can help future teachers prepare to meet these demands in a positive and professionally satisfying way” (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 768).

The present study contributes to the conversation, putting forward a framework which might support tertiary education in scaffolding the enacted professional identity, or stance, of teachers as part of their overall fulfilment. Teachers’ own perspectives of fulfilment were explored, and wellbeing was framed as a valuable aim irrespective of any link to student outcomes. This approach to studying fulfilment alongside specialist teachers seems to have tapped into deeper and more meaningful aspects of teachers lives.

The pivotal role of tertiary education was foregrounded as supporting the fierce practice of teachers in ways that encourage their resilience and resistance. As Margolis et al. argue (2014, p. 392), we “must grapple with [our] role and stance in terms of how [our] own coursework and pedagogical approaches support the development of teachers who can obtain and maintain work in the current teaching professional – as well as improve it”. This is especially relevant in the current education environment, where teachers must respond to tightening policies and structures.

Lessons from the methodology

The intention of an overarching methodology of participatory narrative inquiry, infused with positive psychology and culturally responsive practice, was to capture deep, rich accounts of practice from the perspective of the participants themselves. As with all qualitative research, and narrative inquiry in particular, I hoped that readers would get a strong sense of the context, see aspects of their own lives in the narrative, and be supported to clarify for themselves which elements might be transferable (Tippett et al., 2007, p. 83). Additionally, I hoped that participants would benefit from the process in constructive and tangible ways, including having their experiences affirmed by others through whānau group discussions.

Looking back, I continue to value the methodology. Much of the related research is quantitative, and small-scale qualitative research allowed for much-needed stories of job crafting, role overload (Solberg & Wong, 2016), and collaborative approaches to shaping professional roles (Timms et al, 2014). A strengths-based narrative approach did indeed capture the stories of participants in ways that strengthened participants and the present study. I learned time and time again the power of language in constructing reality, and noticed the subtle changes to my language that had not-so-subtle influences on participants' understandings. *Stance*, for example, elicited very different understandings than *professional identity*, and got to the active and dynamic embodiment of professional identity in authentic practices. *Wellbeing* narrowed the discourse, zooming participants into superficial and physical aspects of their self-care, while *fulfilment* zoomed out to life satisfaction and added temporal dimensions looking back on a life well lived, looking forward to one's vision, and feeding those into the present moment (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

In framing my research, I could have focused on avoiding burnout, rather than maintaining stamina and seeking fulfilment. However, following on from Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's challenge to identify what makes a life worth living (2000), I worked from a base of strengths to unpack the barriers and enablers of wellbeing/fulfilment. Focusing on the tensions, with a presumption of competence, illuminated the framework of stance, supports and stamina; examining the barriers helped us to co-construct ideas of fulfilment and to map a path forward.

Because participants and I were immersed in a professional programme and education sector which prioritises bicultural practice and lifting outcomes for others, it was important to conduct the research in ways that mirrored this commitment. Adhering to the principle that research is only valuable to the extent it lifts the community (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Morrison & Vaiolenti, 2011a; Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito & Bateman, 2008), I wanted to give back to the group by giving participants the chance to learn from the collective wisdom. This intention was inspired by "an indigenous worldview ... [whereby] individual qualities need to be understood also in the context of their contribution to the survival of the group" (Macfarlane et al., 2008, p. 107).

Traditionally, koha is the gift exchanged as two groups are formally joined: a tangible offering to the host by the guests in a ritual which acknowledges and sustains the power and self-determination of each group (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). In research, koha is commonly used to honour the contribution each participant has made to the study (Jones et al., 2006). In my study, as in most research, the participants initially perceived me to be the 'host' of my own study and themselves the guests. In contrast, I saw them as the hosts of their own knowledge, wisdom and stories and my role as a grateful guest alongside them on the journey. Koha was an important first step in shifting our relationship.

As tangible thanks for the gifts of knowledge they shared with me, I came to each interview with food and coffee. Less tangibly, my intention was to give back through my careful treatment of their stories; support for the practice- and study-focused concerns they shared during participant-driven whānau group meetings, and representation of their ideas through real time in changes to the Specialist Teaching programme. My hope was for these small acts to become "culturally meaningful [and] for the researcher to become part of the whānau rather than to act as a consultant" (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p. 174).

Initially, I undervalued the extent to which individual and whānau group meetings were also koha, with each person believing they received more than they gave. Unsolicited emails from participants confirmed the benefits of membership in the research.

I was so pleased to have visited with everyone on Friday evening. I came home feeling refreshed and uplifted. What a lovely group of women! I hope the evening was as useful for you as it was for me. I have been on an emotional rollercoaster for a wee while ... and Friday was just what I needed. (Friend, personal communication after whānau group, 26 July 2015)

Doing these meditations around gratitude has continued to help me realize how lucky I am to know & have wonderful people in my life. You are inspirational, the true essence of calm and beauty under pressure, mana

wahine ... and a conduit for so many, connecting us, and strengthening us. You are opening up possibilities for us all. I hope you realise just how much you do and how appreciative we are to have you guiding and supporting us. I would walk across hot coals for you Wendy! If there is any more I could do for you I would! You just need to ask. (Finella, personal communication after whānau group, 27 July 2015)

The depth of whanaungatanga in this research was evidenced by participants' requests to remain involved, in the project and with each other, after the data was collected. Participants frequently contacted me with offers of further support and to hear more about the findings; two asked me to supervise their masters, and a year later the entire group came together to contribute money to the participant who lost her child in a horrible accident. Moreover, in contrast to research paradigms that put boundaries around post-research relationships, prohibiting this extended involvement would have been inappropriate; "this would be akin to trampling their mana" (Jones et al., 2006, p. 67).

Benefits for participants

To explore possible benefits for participants more fully and formally, at the conclusion of each final interview I asked one open-ended question to explore what, if any, benefits they experienced in being part of the present study. Participant responses can be divided into four themes, which may have useful implications for other researchers, tertiary providers and professional organisations wishing to develop the wellbeing and professional fulfilment of their participants/members. These themes included the space and place to consider wellbeing; having a relationship with a teacher or other mentor; belonging to a whānau group, and being part of something that was making a difference. The first two themes seemed to focus more on receiving, whereas the last two themes focused on giving and receiving.

All four themes resonate with Duncan-Andrade's (2008) tenets of emancipatory pedagogy, which are equally useful in reflecting on participatory research methodology, by giving participants the opportunity to:

- Engage – participate in genuine dialogues that validated their unique knowledge and explore topics that were important to them.
- Empower – strengthen their sense of individual and collective agency, to respond to barriers they see as impacting their lives and the lives of others.
- Experience – consider diverse perspectives, including those often unheard in their daily encounters, in a safe and supportive space
- Enact – utilise their growing agency; learn from the enablers, barriers and tensions, and note the implications for their practice. (Duncan-Andrade, 2008, p. 3)

Engage: Foregrounding spaces, places and faces of wellbeing

Participants' responses indicated their valuing of spaces for discussions around wellbeing, including formal places in the academy. They seemed to appreciate the opportunity to deeply consider their own beliefs, knowledge and practices, in a way that was meaningful to them and validated their lived experiences and wealth of knowledge.

I don't have those conversations. I don't have the opportunity to talk about wellbeing, talk about authentic practice, talk about our practice and our study. I don't get that at home; I don't get that. I don't have friends that do the same sort of thing or are even teachers. But those conversations [at the whānau group] and even talking about authentic practice with you, wow that's fulfilling. (Friend, Post-2015)

Universities are starting the conversation, for instance through posters around campus offering support for things like stress and anxiety. While the intention of such programmes is commendable, the language can reflect deficit thinking by focusing on what might be wrong with students. Secondly, rather than incorporating wellbeing into discussions of professional identity and professional practice, the conversations are siloed when responsibility is delegated to health and counselling centres. This gives the unintended impression that wellbeing is optional, on the side, and personal rather than inextricably linked to the professional. There is a risk also that the message

implies that only some people experience feelings of stress and anxiety, rather than framing these responses as a natural part of being human.

The very first time I listened to you in that auditorium, talking about the importance of wellbeing, I thought I was in a parallel universe. Because it was something else to be in an academic tertiary environment and somebody talking on a human level of what it means to be on that learning journey. It was like a breath of fresh air. (Finella, Post-2015)

Integrating wellbeing into professional competencies and course content may be a more productive approach for Universities and other tertiary institutions. This could include critical conversations of wellbeing and identity which deconstruct popularised notions of wellbeing and quick fixes reminiscent of that which is promised by fitness centres (Kelchtermans, 2008).

The self-reflection has been part of it – asking these questions and actually thinking about it. ... The first interview made me reflect on why I am talking about [positive examples] that I did twenty years ago and why aren't I talking about things that I'm doing now? ... Because I wasn't doing what I want to do. (Sam, Post-2015)

If conversations are narrowed to wellbeing, there is a risk they will be minimised, dismissed or taken up selectively. Belinda's response foregrounds wellbeing as a by-product of a larger conversation around professional practice and belonging.

I can say anything to you and you are not going to judge me. ... It's a chance to talk and I like the fact that it has continued to make me think about what I have studied and how I have applied it and who I've become and who I am going to continue to be. For me it's a really future-focused thing and it has helped me decide what my continuing path is going to be.

[Thinking of the Masters] I thought I won't bother doing that and don't need to do that. Now I am like 'No, I really want to go back'. I miss the study and I want to be able to interact with everybody and go on to the

next step and take time to talk more. ... I love interacting with people and looking at their worlds. For me I suppose by doing this with you it's kept that alive; it's reassured me that I do want to go and do [the Masters] now. (Belinda, post-2015)

Universities and organisations could also expand existing supports to truly address the wellbeing needs of students. In my role on the Specialist Teaching programme, my first clue that a student is struggling is often through an extension request. Students frequently ask for an additional week to complete an assignment, whether or not time is the actual issue or the likely remedy. Regardless, the request begins a conversation, which then leads to richer conversations about integrating study with practice, challenging perfectionism and so on.

I have really enjoyed [being in the research]; it has been one of the highlights of the study ... that opportunity to just sit down and have just two or three hours to think about wellbeing you know, it's been really good. (Hannah, Post-2015)

Empower: Relationship with their teacher

Participants indicated that dialogues with someone they regarded as one step ahead on the journey empowered them to enact their self-understandings in their own lives and work. Their responses suggested the importance of relationships predicated on trust and positive regard with another person prepared to reflect on the big issues. "You know how you are always so grateful for our time? It doesn't feel like that, it feels like it is really nice to sit down and talk to someone about this kind of stuff" (Friend, Post-2015).

The relationship is based on trust – "I can be honest with you" (Finella, Post-2015) – but also having someone reaffirm their contributions and gifts. Like the teachers in Bullough's (2005) study, these participants valued the emotional support from a mentor first and foremost.

Honestly it has made a huge difference for me and part of that is just feeling heard because I completely feel unheard in my [workplace], that I

have no voice and no recognition of anything that I do. So it is just such a blessing to have a forum where I can share my frustrations but also celebrate the things that are good. ... So to have that opportunity and to hear from you that I do actually bring something of value to this role is just absolutely invaluable. (Katie, Post-2015)

According to participants, specialist teachers may need faces of wellbeing, people in leadership roles who grapple openly with the tensions inherent in developing stance, stamina and fulfilment. For Finella, I was able to be one of those faces.

I do feel like I've been almost completely wrung out in this job and feel like I need to give myself a bit of a break, because it's a job where you feel like you do give so much of yourself. Again, you are like Superwoman to me because of how much you manage to do and give of yourself to so many people. (Finella, Post-2015)

It was, of course, important to deconstruct notions of "Superwoman" by talking candidly about the pressures that all of us face. Done genuinely, there are benefits for both parties; tangibly, as strategies are shared, and less tangibly, in feelings of not being alone. For Mia, the benefits included a sense of connection and increased confidence: "What I got out of it was absolute confidence in myself, but also somebody to be a sounding board to talk to about stuff and you totally get it and I just love that" (Mia, Post-2015).

Daphne's comment reinforced the importance of reciprocity and equal footing in every relationship, and foregrounded the importance of transparent relationships between researchers and participants, teachers and students. Supporting the research, and me in particular, reaffirmed her own strengths and potential to contribute. "I think an awareness that everybody needs support at whatever level; PhDs are way up there and the fact that we can all support each other at whatever level" (Post-2015).

Experience: Belonging to a culturally authentic community of practice

Whānau groups are an optional support for every student in the Specialist Teaching programme, and a bespoke aspect of the present study. They bring together diverse

people and allow for deep discussion of important issues. Participants in this study had diverse beliefs, backgrounds and skill sets. As such, the whānau group provided opportunities to hear from others, including parents of diverse learners working as specialist teachers; people with varying degrees of fulfilment, et al. with different cultural perspectives on fulfilment and wellbeing.

Wenger et al. (2002) note that people typically join a community of practice for one of three reasons – the head (domain knowledge), heart (community) or hands (practical tools) – but stay for the sense of community. As with the programme’s other whānau groups, the focus whānau group was designed in hopes of meeting participants’ needs in all three areas. Additionally, irrespective of why a specialist teacher joined the present study, I hoped they would benefit from the connection to others.

For Finella, learning in community was essential; it was the whānau group infrastructure within the Specialist Teaching programme and the research that resonated for her. She reflected back on her first day on the programme, deciding to join her local whānau group and also this research with its whānau group component.

When you started talking about whānau groups I suddenly felt like I was going to be able to do this, and do it knowing I wasn’t alone. ... It resonated with my cultural understanding of what it meant to be present, to be alive, to be learning, to be engaged. It was the first time in an educational setting that I thought someone was talking with some authenticity about what it meant to be a learner and to have that support. (Finella, Post-2015)

Like Finella, every participant commented on the value of being part of the community of practice wrapped around the research. Participants valued the whānau group as “an opportunity to also come together with likeminded people ... who really get it and they are on the same kind of wavelength, ... willing to give something to other people and to put themselves out there” (Katie, Post-2015).

As they reflected back on the benefits of the focus whānau group, they weighted different aspects of the experience differently. In line with Wenger et al.’s (2002) research, some participants commented on the benefits for their practice (hands). Sam

for instance, valued the opportunity to hear diverse perspectives within the group, and to apply some of the cultural understandings in particular in her own practice. There is a growing expectation that specialist teachers will develop their understandings of Māori knowledge, values and philosophies in order to respond in culturally authentic ways (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013). Well aware that she must first know herself – including her cultures, worldviews, identities and biases – before she could work effectively with Māori (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013), Sam valued the window and mirror offered by the group.

An area I'm still developing is my cultural awareness. ... I have done it in my study but then you go back into your cultural bubble. ... [When people share diverse perspectives] you think 'Wow, that really is a different cultural view from my own'. And that reminder to be more open and look at my way of looking at things as just my cultural perspective, and there are better ones out there or better ways that I certainly could embrace more. (Sam, Post-2015)

For other participants, it was the domain knowledge (head) within the community that excited them. In particular, several participants valued learning about wellbeing from a diverse group of teachers with a shared interest in keeping themselves well and supporting the wellbeing of others.

To have the time to sit down and just think about wellbeing with a group of like-minded people. In that I don't mean we all think the same but we all are concerned about wellbeing and to have the opportunity to test ideas out in a ... right from the beginning in quite a supportive way. ... The fact that we had some quite interesting discussions and obviously people coming from different places, but it was good to be able to have those discussions and set time aside to be able to do that. (Hannah, Post-2015)

Notably, in line with Wenger et al.'s (2002) notion that people join communities of practice for various reasons but stay for the community, these participants valued the connection to other specialist teachers the most.

Just being with others I think and just talking around [wellbeing] has been lovely. Because I think when you do your study you don't get to really know people ... and it is really nice just to get to know people from different backgrounds, different teaching experiences and on different journeys. I think that is fantastic, all different cultures and just sharing a piece of themselves has been wonderful. (Mia, Post-2015)

Kirsten summarised the group's sentiments eloquently, with a focus on community and the way it lifted her understandings, motivation and sense of connection.

Honestly being part of the group has been, how can I describe it? It has just brought everything alive. Often the study is a very personal thing and you take from it and it's very selfish. The group itself has been very giving; I have met new people with different perspectives, wonderful perspectives that I hadn't even considered. Sharing not just their knowledge but their experiences and their ideas. I am going to say the word passion and I hate the word passion but I don't know how else to describe it in such an authentic way. They are so motivated and honest; they are just such a great bunch of people. (Kirsten, Post-2015)

Enact: Being part of something that was making a difference

Duncan-Andrade (2008) urges educators to go beyond the traditional narrative of social justice, which he summarises as using education to escape inequitable conditions, to return knowledge and skills in ways that transform the community. The findings from the present study underscore the extent to which specialist teachers are committed to the aims of social justice in their work with children and families/whānau who have been marginalised.

Participants' responses foregrounded their belief in what we were doing as a group. They perceived discussion topics as meaningful for them as specialist teachers, and relevant for their work with teachers, children and families/whānau in a Aotearoa New Zealand context. Pākehā participants particularly valued being part of a culturally diverse group, one in which they could experience and discuss bicultural and

multicultural practices. Māori and Niuean participants said it was empowering to instil cultural understandings within the framework.

You are guiding people like myself to go out there and the fact that you are a Pākehā woman coming into this country and speaking on the level you are speaking on, we are so lucky ... because for a lot of Māori ... sometimes I feel it's very hard to get the message through that you are getting through to people because even though when we talk we are talking about the same thing and yet it's a language that's easy to digest when you do it for the masses. For me it's huge for [people] ... to be reminded that they are important and they matter. You have ... helped Pākehā begin to grasp concepts ... and to use concepts like whānau groups [is] huge. (Finella, Post-2015)

The research was reflexive, responding to participants' needs and preferences in real time changes to the research and the Specialist Teaching programme. Participants could see the difference they were making. They shared that the act of working in community to consider and challenge aspects of their lives empowered them to make changes in their practice. Akin to Leana et al.' research (2009), which introduced collective job crafting through communities of practice, the present study provided a space for "considering how employees working together might craft their jobs" (p. 1170). In a field as new as specialist teaching, participants saw this as a unique opportunity.

I find it difficult to sit down and to think and to write, scared that I'm not doing it right and I am not disciplined ... but when I am with [the whānau group] and I am sharing and being able to listen to the stuff that you are getting from people it's like, it's mind blowing stuff to be hearing that people are hearing this stuff because [we] are starting the conversation. I feel really honoured ... like I have got this little treat that I have got to be a part of. (Finella, Post-2015)

Wenger also discusses 'legitimate peripheral participation' as the value of participation even on the very outer rings of the community (2000). In the present study, peripheral

participation came from an unexpected source: the person transcribing the interviews. The following is from a spontaneous email disclosing the ways her peripheral involvement in the study impacted her from one step removed.

I am working on the transcripts and I just had to take a break to let you know something. ... I think working with you on the interviews is a kind of therapy for me and I have tried very hard not to be moved by your interviewers and yourself as I want to be as professionally distanced as possible. Over the course of all the interviews I have listened to so many metaphors and they are so empowering, they have given me so many things to think about. Over the space of a year I have been able to look at many issues from my lifetime and understand them in a much better way, a way that allows me to accept them and move forward. ... I am so shocked and in awe of all of you; you have managed to broaden my mind and you would never have known it unless I told you. Imagine just how much good work all of you do daily but never realise. Keep up the life changing work because it is very much needed. (Personal correspondence, November 2015)

Teachers in the present study valued four aspects of participation: being able to engage with ideas; having a relationship with a teacher; engaging with and learning from a community, and being part of something that was making a difference. These benefits fit well with emancipatory pedagogies' overarching goals of engaging, empowering, experiencing and enacting (Duncan-Andrade, 2008). Participants engaged with content and community in ways that drew on and stretched their personal understandings whilst contributing to a framework with potential impact for children, families/whānau and teachers and other educational professionals.

Along the way, participants developed their own stamina, found a new source of support and lifted their own stamina as professionals. An unintended but key finding of the present study was that the *what* and *how* of the research influenced the content as well as the form of participants' experiences. Through genuine dialogue, as participants focused on certain ideas, those ideas developed. Participants shared the

ways they refined their stance as a result of conversations about stance; they increased their supports as they engaged with others in the focus group, and their stamina was fortified through the research process, content and community. In essence, being part of the research not only provided opportunities to explore the ideas of stance, stamina, supports and fulfilment, but actually developed these areas in participants' lives in ways that were not developing naturally outside the research space.

The implications of the methodology for researchers

Macfarlane and Macfarlane (2013) highlight the essential components of culturally responsive research as: incorporating Māori knowledge; building relationships and self-awareness; ensuring relevance and power-sharing, and unleashing potential. In the present study, working to construct and carry out culturally responsive, participatory research was complex and messy. As an embedded researcher, I found that the rewards were in the complexity. The structure of the research enabled opportunities to find and create shared ground, and I learned so much from trying to cultivate the relationships and spaces that make this possible. Equally, we valued the challenges to our taken-for-granted assumptions, the sense of being in this together, and the solidarity that empowered us to act on our own lives.

Narrative inquiry continued to be a good match for the questions I wanted to explore, and for gathering deep, highly-contextualised stories of practice. David (2016) asserts the need to create space for “internal feelings and external options – while maintaining the distinction between the two” as part of having a meaningful life (p. 87). Participants' responses suggest that the opportunity to sit alongside others, and glimpse their world through rich and vulnerable conversations, supported the group to unpack those feelings and options in a supportive context.

Another, unintended gift of the research was the chance to reflect on and develop my own stance, supports and stamina. Being part of a true community of practice, with fourteen other women grappling with similar tensions in their lives, emboldened me as a researcher, professional, student and writer. When my stamina was lacking, they reminded me how important our findings were, and how needed they were in the

field. When my stance as a researcher felt new and flimsy, they affirmed what I was trying to do. And most of all, I valued the experience of being part of such a caring group of women and experienced teachers.

Implications for postgraduate programmes wishing to support the stance, stamina and supports of their students

Teaching is a caring profession (O'Connor 2006) but care is not a dominant narrative in higher education (Laws & Fiedler, 2012). The affirmative responses of teachers in the present study suggest that universities might utilise multi-pronged opportunities to bridge this gap, by supporting students' wellbeing and fulfilment through student-responsive processes, dedicated course content, and the explicit development of students' stance, supports and stamina.

This research was not designed to be an evaluation of professional practice preparation programmes in tertiary education. However, because both the participants and I were situated within one postgraduate programme, we were able to discuss tertiary education extensively. Likewise, my time with fourteen postgraduate students serves as a microcosm for how teacher-student relationships can look. As such, the present study has implications for tertiary programmes wishing to develop the stance, supports and stamina of their students in order to cultivate the fierce practice and fulfilment of professionals. In this study, participants indicated that what supported their fulfilment as professionals was the explicit focus on wellbeing, as well as the implicit benefits of belonging, growing and making a difference that supported participants' fulfilment.

The particular approach tertiary educators take is critical as it both fulfils and models a duty of care while safeguarding the journeys of future teachers/professionals.

Potentially, it instils lifelong habits of mind and practice that protect the professional and lift the sector. In fulfilling the duty of care, tertiary teachers need not be paternalistic in their approach as the present study suggests that protecting students from difficult experiences may rob them of the rewards that come with transformation. Support must be offered in ways that reinforce students' self-determination, independence and interdependence.

As part of this, tertiary teachers can frame the challenges of study, and accompanying feelings of stress and self-doubt, as a natural part of the process. The underlying message is that struggling is nothing to be ashamed of or to suffer in silence. They can help to dismantle the dominant image of the postgraduate student as the solo, independent and self-motivated person who flies through study, never asking for help or leaning on others. By contrast, asking for help can be reframed as taking charge of one's support as a way to grow and sustain stamina; a sign of strength rather than weakness, and an example of *ako* in a learning community.

Edwards suggests that teacher education needs to focus on developing professionals' ability to work together, and to negotiate meanings with others (2005). The present study suggests that the content of these conversations could include wellbeing and fulfilment. As part of this, popular notions of wellbeing, balance and so forth can and perhaps should be interrogated. Professionals do not want less, flat and stable; challenging work is ultimately the most fulfilling, which disrupts a natural inclination to pull back in order to protect one's wellbeing. Time and time again, participants noted the fulfilment gained from the difficult conversations and most challenging work, from standing up for their beliefs and 'fighting the good fight' for diverse learners and their families/*whānau*.

Limitations and future research

The present study was carefully constructed and executed. However, as with all research, there are several limitations worth considering. Most notable is the size and mix of participants. All fourteen participants were women enrolled in one postgraduate programme in specialist teaching. They were similar in age and stage, and all based in wider Auckland. These women had an inherent interest in wellbeing and the luxury of reflecting deeply on their lives over the course of their two-year study.

Although the research was never meant to be generalised, readers will inevitably draw meaning from participants' experiences and the way they've been storied. I acknowledge that what they take away from these stories, they take from a small group of woman at a particular place and time. The findings may have been different

had I been able to include men, participants from across Aotearoa New Zealand and teachers in different contexts and stages of their careers.

I hope that every teacher might glimpse themselves in these pages. However, classroom teachers may have different issues, and issues of different intensities, due to the nature of their work. Additionally, classroom teachers don't always have the time to consider these issues in such depth, or in such a collective way. They may value and benefit from reflection just as much, but without the space or support to consider their stance, for instance, in and amongst myriad demands on their time.

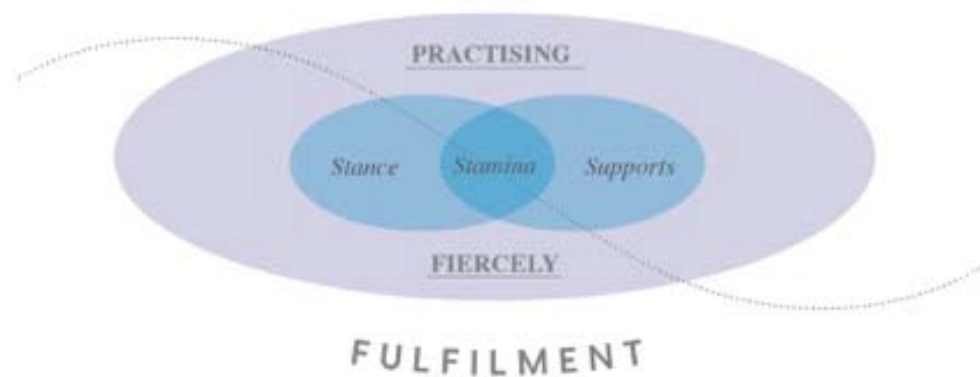
The perspectives of children and young people, and families/whānau, are missing from the present study as well. What we believed to be authentic practices, for example, might not resonate for diverse learners themselves. This is a significant limitation in a study hoping to bolster teachers' fulfilment in part so that they might bring their best to the children with whom they work.

Future research could address these limitations; the Practising Fiercely framework could be taken in a number of directions to extend its theoretical base and its application in practice. It would be useful to trial the framework beyond education, for instance counselling or clergy, and also to research the framework in practice to further develop its utility. Issues of age and gender were beyond the scope of this research; future research might consider the framework across groups, to better understand the nuances of the framework for different groups such as early career researchers, male teachers and youth.

Having emphasised the need to continually reflect on our own positioning, values and beliefs, in order to pivot our practice as needed, it would be useful to unpack techniques for doing so. David's (2016) research on mindful practice in order to achieve what she terms emotional agility, provides a promising future direction. Whilst my study was predicated on participants' reflective practice, a fine-grained understanding of their processes and moment-to-moment decision-making would be useful. Exploring the mindful elements of stance, stamina and practising fiercely would help us to better understand the presence professionals need, and can cultivate, to

maintain their stance and stamina, and to understand the choices within their intentional and fierce practice.

Limitations aside, I am proud of a study which explored teachers' lives in order to better understand how they might sustain their professional fulfilment. Or, as Mia describes it, to support teachers in finding that "kind of calm that comes over you when you know you have done really well for that child. ... Like sunshine in your heart really, in your beating heart."



Conclusion

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Māori terms

(As used in this study and sourced from maoridictionary.co.nz)

Ako one Polynesian word connoting both to learn and to teach

Aotearoa the Māori name for New Zealand

Hauora health and wellbeing

Kaupapa Māori research and theory based on pre-colonisation practices and values, recently revived to challenge western methods that can disadvantage Māori (Hill, 2016)

Koha gift or contribution used to maintain social relationships

Mana enduring, indestructible force within a person; personal power

Manaakitanga hospitality, kindness, generosity, support; the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others.

Marae focal point of Māori community; grounds that belong to a particular tribe

Pākehā New Zealander of European descent

Te Ao Māori Māori worldview

Te Reo Māori the Māori language

Te Tiriti o Waitangi The Treaty of Waitangi

Tino rangatiratanga self-determination, autonomy

Tuakana Teina relationships in which an older or more skilled person supports a younger or less skilled person; however, the roles can be reversed at any time

Wairua one's non-physical spirit or soul, distinct from the body

Whānau traditionally the extended family, and used in modern contexts to connote friends and other with a family-like connection

Whanaungatanga relationship, kinship, sense of connection that provides people with a sense of belonging

Whakapapa Māori recitation of genealogy, used to locate the person within their context, land and tribal grouping

Whakawhanaungatanga process of establishing relationships, relating well to others.

Appendix B: Participant interview consent form



Exploring authentic practice through a lens of wellbeing

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet about this project and I have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I know that:-

- My participation in the project is voluntary;
- I am free to withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage;

I agree/do not agree to the interviews being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my transcribed interviews returned to me for editing.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name – printed

Appendix C: Focus group participant consent form



Exploring authentic practice through a lens of wellbeing

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group or name the other participants in the focus group.

I understand that information shared in the private, online whānau support group forum may be used as research data.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name – printed

Appendix D: 2014 student information sheet

Researcher Introduction

Kia ora, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei. My name is Wendy Holley-Boen and I am a lecturer on the Specialist Teaching programme jointly facilitated by Massey University and University of Canterbury. The purpose of this project is to work alongside a small group of Year 1 and Year 2 students as they work towards their postgraduate diploma. Together, we will develop our understandings of integrated wellbeing and authentic practice: what these concepts mean for students, how they are connected, and how they support future professional practice. I have a Masters degree in educational psychology, and this project is part of my work towards a PhD.

Project Description and Invitation

The research project has two phases, one in 2014 and one in 2015. In the first phase, I will work with four Year 1 and four Year 2 students to better understand the concepts of integrated wellbeing and authentic practice. Individually and as a group, we will explore the connections between the two, and the enablers of each. We will do this through individual interviews at the beginning and end of the year, three whānau support group meetings and one focus group meeting. These topics may also come up in our private online whānau support group forum.

In the second phase, former Year 1 students will carry on in much the same way but with four new Year 1 students in their whānau support group. Additionally, former Year 2 students will be interviewed at the beginning and end of 2015 and participate in one focus group meeting.

Furthermore, in 2015, I will talk with Specialist Teaching staff about how our understandings fit with theirs, and how they might be further embedded into our programme. I invite you to consider participating in this research if it fits with your interests and other commitments.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

After hearing an overview of the project at the February 2014 Block Course, please email me with expressions of interest within the following week. To be considered for the research project, each student must be:

- Enrolled in the Specialist Teaching programme
- Based in the wider Auckland area
- Willing to participate in a 2-year study
- Able to participate in two one-hour interviews, three WSG meetings and one focus group each year.
- Interested in engaging in the private, online whānau support group forum

As we will have a small group of students, it will also be important to include a range of perspectives (for instance, people from different endorsements). Students who are not able to be included in this research will still benefit from the existing whānau support group structure.

Project Procedures

In 2014, each participant will give six hours to the study. This allows for one-hour interviews at the beginning and end of the year, and one three-hour focus group meeting. We will meet at times and places convenient to each participant and outside of work time.

These sessions will be audiotaped, and an additional hour is factored in for participants to review their transcripts before approving them.

Every student in the Specialist Teaching programme is given access to one private online whānau support group forum. Information shared in the focus group's private online forum may be used as part of this research.

This study, and my role as researcher in conducting this research, is separate from my regular teaching role.

To make sure there are no conflicts of interest, I will not mark any assignments of anyone participating in the study.

Data Management

Participation in the study is confidential from everyone outside of the group. All identifying information will be stripped from interviews and focus group discussions. Consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office; all data will be kept in a different locked filing cabinet. All data will be destroyed after a set storage period.

We will work together to make sense of themes in the data, and participants will have an opportunity to review their transcripts to decide which information can be included in the study. At the end of the study, each participant will receive a summary of the information.

Participants' Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. Non-participation in the study will not affect your grades or your coursework in any way.

If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;

- Withdraw from the study at any time.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, you may remain in the focus whānau support group or transfer to another of the Auckland-based whānau support groups. In either case, no further research data will be collected from you.

Withdrawing from the study will not impact your grades or coursework in any way.

Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;

Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

You can ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

My supervisors are Jill Bevan-Brown (j.m.bevan-brown@massey.ac.nz) and Jude MacArthur (j.a.macarthur@massey.ac.nz)

Please feel free to contact me or either of my supervisors, if you have any questions about the project.

Thank you for your time.

Wendy Holley-Boen
w.holley-boen@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 13/75. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, please contact Dr Nathan Matthews, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 80877, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix E: Interview schedules 2014 and 2015

| Beginning of 2014 and 2015 |
|--|
| Tell me about yourself, personally and professionally. |
| What made you decide to become a teacher? |
| What made you decide to work in (ST endorsement)? |
| How would you hope the children and young people, families and whanau with whom you work currently would describe you? |
| When you look back on your career years from now, what do you think you will be most proud of? |
| As a postgraduate student, what keeps you going? In the programme? Outside of the programme? |
| As a teacher, what keeps you going? (Probe in and out of work, probe 'who' as well as 'what') |
| As a teacher, what inspires you? (Probe in and out of work, probe 'who' as well as 'what') |
| I sometimes think of "authentic practice" as practice that aligns with a person's identity, beliefs and deepest knowledge... Talk about a time when your <u>practice</u> felt most authentic to you. |
| How did it unfold? |
| What is it about the situation that stands out for you? |
| What is it about YOU that made it happen? |
| Who else was there, and how did they influence the situation? |
| Thinking about this experience, what would you say "authentic practice" means to you? (Probe: Fit with identity/beliefs/knowledge/skills if these are not mentioned.) |
| Were there things going on in other areas of your life that may have influenced the situation? |
| What connections to your wellbeing might there have been? (Probe: before, during and after if these are not mentioned.) |

I sometimes think of wellbeing as that sense of everything being connected, well and whole: all the dimensions of one's self, their connections to others and to their context. Tell me about a time where you felt a sense of "wellbeing".

What did it look like?

Which of your core qualities shone through?

Who else was there, and what role did they play?

What would they have noticed about your wellbeing? How would they have described you?

Thinking about this experience, what would you say "wellbeing" means to you?

What connections to your practice might there have been?
(Probe: before, during and after if these are not mentioned.)

Earlier, you defined authentic practice as...

In general, what do you see as barriers to your authentic practice?

What enablers would you say support your authentic practice?

Earlier, you defined wellbeing as...

In general, what do you see as barriers to your wellbeing?

What enablers would you say support your wellbeing?

What insights have you gathered from working to overcome barriers?

Do you have any questions about wellbeing and/or authentic practice?

End of 2014

Last time, I asked you to tell me a little bit about yourself, personally and professionally.

Would you do that again now?

How do you typically describe yourself to others?
(Probe: culture)

How do you describe your professional role to others?

How have these descriptions changed in the last year?

As a postgraduate student, what keeps/kept you going?

In the programme?

Outside of the programme?

As a teacher, what keeps you going?

(Probe in and out of work, probe 'who' as well as 'what')

As a teacher, what inspires you?

(Probe in and out of work, probe 'who' as well as 'what')

We have been thinking about authentic practice this year. Talk about a time this year when your practice has felt most authentic to you.

How did it unfold?

What is it about the situation that stands out for you?

What is it about YOU that made it happen?

Who else was there, and how did they influence the situation?

Thinking about this story, what would you say "authentic practice" means to you?

(Probe: Fit with identity/beliefs/knowledge/skills if these are not mentioned.)

How were things in the rest of your life at the time?

(Probe: wellbeing at the time)

Talk about a time this year when your study has felt most authentic to you.

What is it about the situation that stood out for you?

What are your supports, and how did they influence the situation?

What is it about YOU that made this happen?

How would you describe your wellbeing at the time?

What do you see as the connections between AP and WB?

We have also been thinking about wellbeing this year. Tell me about a time where you felt a sense of "wellbeing".

What did it look like? Who else was there, and what role did they play?

What would they have noticed about your wellbeing? How would they have described you?

Which of your core qualities shone through?

Thinking about this story, what would you say “wellbeing” means to you?

In your portfolios for this course we’ve asked you to write about your professional identity and how that has developed over the year. I wondered if you could share with me some of your thoughts on your professional identity as a ‘specialist teacher’...

How would you describe the way in which your professional identity has developed over this year?

Where would you say the big changes have been for you in terms of how you see your professional identity? (How would you describe these changes? What is different now compared with the start of the year?)

We’ve talked about authentic practice and wellbeing and professional identity in our whānau group – how would you describe the connections between these things at this stage of the year? Is there are metaphor you would use to describe these connections, or could you draw a diagram or picture that illustrates these connections as you see them?

In general, what do you see as barriers to your AP/PI/WB? Enablers?

What insights have you gathered from working to overcome barriers?

What questions do YOU have about wellbeing and/or authentic practice?

Looking over your definitions of authentic practice and wellbeing from March, what would you like to change or add?

End of 2015

How do you describe yourself personally and professionally?

How do you describe your role to others?

Any differences in what you emphasise to different audiences?

How would you describe Fulfilment?

We have talked about Stance, Stamina and Supports – as well as the connections between them. Tell me how you see each concept and how you see them connecting to Fulfilment.

How did the Focus Group discussion on these ideas shape your thinking? Did anything in particular support, challenge or stretch your thinking?

How did you relate to the metaphors? Which ones stood out for you (and why?)

Over the year/two years of study, what has been your greatest learning? Which aspect of the study would you say disrupted your practice the most?

What enables you to practise in the ways that fit best with your beliefs, knowledge and skills, i.e. position yourself against the tensions? (Probe: who as well as what)

I would like to have a short description of each of you to include in the thesis. I'd like to share just a bit about you, and then a summary of your unique contribution to the study. For me, what you brought to the study was... What else would you be okay with me sharing?

I've gotten so much out of our time together, and I hope you have as well. Could you comment on what, if anything, you got out of being part of this study?