Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
The Professional Learning Landscape
for Teen Parent Educators in New Zealand

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor in Education at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand.

Johanna Julene Wood
2018
Abstract

Teen Parent Units (TPUs) are a unique context in the New Zealand educational system. The purpose of this study was to explore the professional learning landscape for teen parent educators in New Zealand, using the qualitative in-depth case studies of three TPUs. Drawing on the theoretical framework of complexity theory and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the study provided a rich description of practice and teachers’ perceptions of their professional learning experiences, opportunities, and practice. The study considered teacher professional learning using three recursive subsystems: the teacher subsystem, the context subsystem, and the activity subsystem, to develop a more nuanced understanding of teacher professional learning in the teen parent context. Listening to educators in this space revealed that not only is professional learning a complex system but also proposes that a fourth subsystem—the student subsystem—is needed to understand the professional learning landscape in this space.
Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Lilian Stephan, who passed away in July 2017. Mum was always a great supporter of my passion for learning. She would look after family needs while I shut myself away.

My heartful thanks goes to my supervisors for their guidance, patience and support. To my primary supervisor Professor Glenda Anthony, you have journeyed with me for both my masterate and doctoral study. Your unfailing encouragement and knowledge have got me through. To Dr Vijaya Dharan, your timely responses to drafts and challenging questions at the right times have focused my thinking.

I could not have conducted this research without the participants. To you all, I would like to thank you for your generosity of your time and your openness in revealing your perceptions of the professional learning landscape for you as educators in the teen parent sector.

Last, I would like to especially thank my family. My sister, Anneliese, and her husband Wally, for taking the time to read drafts. To my children, Catriona, Richard, Anja, and Karl, thank you for allowing me to shut myself away and not being there to help you out at times. To my husband, David, your constant encouragement and support over many years have been unfailing. Without you all this journey would not have been completed.
Contents
Abstract .................................................................................................................. i
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... ii
List of Tables .......................................................................................................... vii
List of Figures ......................................................................................................... viii

Chapter One: Introduction ....................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Alternative Education ....................................................................................... 2
  1.2 History of Teen Parent Units in New Zealand .................................................. 7
  1.3 Research Objective ......................................................................................... 9
  1.4 Research Questions ......................................................................................... 9
  1.5 Overview of Chapters ..................................................................................... 9

Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................. 11
  2.1 Professional Learning Landscape .................................................................. 11
      2.1.1 What does professional learning involve? ........................................... 12
      2.1.2 What influences professional learning? ............................................. 13
  2.2 Teacher as a Subsystem ................................................................................. 16
      2.2.1 Teacher learning ................................................................................. 16
      2.2.2 Dispositions to learning, attitudes, and beliefs ............................... 20
      2.2.3 Motivation .......................................................................................... 22
      2.2.4 Career stage ....................................................................................... 25
  2.3 Context as a Subsystem ................................................................................. 25
      2.3.1 Policy .................................................................................................. 27
      2.3.2 Leadership .......................................................................................... 29
      2.3.3 Culture ............................................................................................... 31
  2.4 Activity as a Subsystem .................................................................................. 33
      2.4.1 Models and types of professional learning ...................................... 33
      2.4.2 Formal versus informal learning ..................................................... 37
  2.5 Complexity Theory as Lens to Study Professional Learning ....................... 37
  2.6 Summary ...................................................................................................... 40

Chapter Three: Methodology .................................................................................. 43
  3.1 Situating the Research and the Researcher .................................................... 44
  3.2 Theoretical Framework ................................................................................. 45
3.2.1 Complexity theory ................................................................. 45
3.3 Research Design ........................................................................ 48
  3.3.1 Case study methodology ...................................................... 49
  3.3.2 Ethical considerations ........................................................... 50
  3.3.3 Participants ........................................................................ 52
  3.3.4 Data collection ..................................................................... 53
  3.3.5 Pilot ..................................................................................... 53
  3.3.6 Interviews ........................................................................... 54
  3.3.7 Document analysis .............................................................. 54
  3.3.8 Data management ............................................................... 55
  3.3.9 Data analysis ..................................................................... 55
3.4 Evaluating Quality of Research .................................................... 58
  3.4.1 Design limitations ............................................................... 59
3.5 Presentation of the Findings ......................................................... 60

Chapter Four: Case A ...................................................................... 63
  4.1 Case A Context ....................................................................... 63
  4.2 Teacher as a Subsystem ........................................................... 64
    4.2.1 Teacher biographies .......................................................... 64
    4.2.2 Perceptions of professional learning ..................................... 66
    4.2.3 Teacher dispositions .......................................................... 67
    4.2.4 Motivation to learn ............................................................ 67
    4.2.5 Desire for learning ............................................................. 68
    4.2.6 Professional learning needs and focus ................................. 69
  4.3 Context as a Subsystem ............................................................ 70
    4.3.1 Policy .............................................................................. 70
    4.3.2 Professional learning practices .......................................... 71
    4.3.3 Staff induction/orientation practices .................................... 71
    4.3.4 Identification of professional learning needs ....................... 72
    4.3.5 Leadership ....................................................................... 74
  4.4 Activity as a Subsystem ............................................................ 75
    4.4.1 Informal conversations ...................................................... 77
    4.4.2 Networking ...................................................................... 77
    4.4.3 Learning on-the-job ........................................................... 78
Chapter Seven: Discussion, Implications for Practice, and Conclusions .......................... 119

7.1 The Teen Parent Unit Professional Learning Landscape ........................................... 120
   7.1.1 Formal versus informal learning ................................................................. 122
   7.1.2 Subject specific learning ............................................................................. 124

7.2 Influences on the Professional Learning Landscape .................................................. 125
   7.2.1 Uniqueness ................................................................................................. 125
   7.2.2 Community of learners ............................................................................... 129

7.3 The Complexity Inherent in the Teen Parent Unit Professional Learning
   Landscape ........................................................................................................... 135

7.4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 140
   7.4.1 Implications for practice ............................................................................. 141
   7.4.2 Contribution to knowledge ....................................................................... 142
   7.4.3 Limitations of the research ...................................................................... 143
   7.4.4 Future research ......................................................................................... 144

7.5 Final Thoughts ...................................................................................................... 145

Reference List .......................................................................................................... 146

Appendices ................................................................................................................. 157

A: Massey University Ethics Approval ........................................................................ 157
B: Information Letter for Governing School ............................................................. 158
C: Information Sheet for Case Study Principal (or Nominee) Participants ............. 160
D: Information Sheet for Teacher Participants ......................................................... 162
E: Principal (or Nominee) Consent ......................................................................... 164
F: Teacher-in-charge Consent .................................................................................. 165
G: Teacher Consent .................................................................................................. 166
H: Authority for the Release of Transcript ............................................................... 167
I: Semi-structured Interview Questions .................................................................. 168
J: Observation Log ..................................................................................................... 169
K: Document Analysis .............................................................................................. 170
L: Coding Sample ...................................................................................................... 171
M: Themes (2nd tier) attributed to subsystems ......................................................... 172
List of Tables

Table 1: Models of professional development .......................................................... 35
Table 2: Data sources .................................................................................................. 53
Table 3: Document sources ....................................................................................... 55
Table 4: Case A: Staffing allocation, length of time in unit, and subject responsibilities ......................................................................................................................... 64
Table 5: Case A: Professional learning activity summary .............................................. 76
Table 6: Case B: Staffing allocation, length of time in unit, and subject responsibilities ......................................................................................................................... 85
Table 7: Case B: Professional learning activity summary .............................................. 96
Table 8: Case C: Staffing allocation, length of time in unit, and subject responsibilities ......................................................................................................................... 103
Table 9: Case C: Professional learning activity summary ............................................. 114
Table 10: General features of each case as a professional learning community ...... 130
List of Figures

Figure 1: The nested educational system .......................................................... 26
Figure 2: The complexity of professional learning ............................................. 39
Figure 3: Conceptual model of the complexity of teacher professional learning .... 48
Figure 4: Research design .................................................................................. 49
Figure 5: Sample cases ...................................................................................... 52
Figure 6: The relative influence of the teacher/context/activity subsystem for Case A ................................................................. 84
Figure 7: The relative influence of the teacher/context/activity subsystem for Case B ........................................................................... 102
Figure 8: The relative influence of the teacher/context/activity subsystem for Case C ................................................................................ 118
Figure 9: The relative influence of the teacher/context/activity subsystem for each case ........................................................................... 136
Figure 10: Introducing a student subsystem to the professional learning landscape .................................................................................. 137