

**The nature and experience of a teacher's calling:
A case study of New Zealand Early Childhood Teachers/Teacher Educators**

Susie Kung

A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Education (MEd)

29 April 2011

School of Education

Primary Supervisor: Nicola Chisnall

Abstract

This study aims to investigate New Zealand early childhood teachers/teacher educators experiences of a *call to teach*. In particular it examines teacher's perceptions and experiences with their *call* over time. Stories from teachers who perceive their work as a *calling* provide insight into the complex and dynamic world of professional practice.

This interpretive case study research gathered stories from seven early childhood teachers/teacher educators in the wider Auckland region (New Zealand) through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were analysed on a case by case basis and then a thematic analysis approach was used to analyse themes across the cases.

The findings of this study reveal that early childhood teachers are drawn to the teaching out of an internal desire to love, care, support and advocate for children and community. They appear to have altruistic tendencies and find teaching a medium to use their gifts and talents meaningfully. External circumstances, which include significant life events, family members, critical friends and the notion of a higher being, help clarify, shape and direct an original *call to teach*. Such a *calling* is lived in practice and engenders a sense of hope, joy, and meaning to a teacher's life. As lived, teaching is experienced as a spiritual, emotional and ethical endeavour rooted in loving and caring relationships. The teachers in this study appear to be intrinsically motivated with an inner satisfaction that motivates and sustains their *call to teach*.

Amongst the implications for this research is the need for policy makers and educators alike to appreciate the emotional and relational nature of a teacher's *calling*. This study indicates that the source of a teacher well-being is emotional satisfaction. For a profession that is rooted in care, teachers' emotional well-being needs to be the focus of on-going professional concern. Efforts to retain teachers in the profession need to be cognisant of this humanistic image of the teacher who is not motivated by material but intrinsic benefits. This study has also shown that teachers' stories are a powerful tool for making a teacher's calling visible. Teachers' narratives provide a window for all involved in education to view a teacher's world from the inside out.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Attestation of authorship	viii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Statement of concern	1
The development of my interest in the teacher’s calling.....	2
Significance of the study	5
The context of the study	6
The global educational context	6
The New Zealand educational context.....	6
An overview of the research	7
An overview of the thesis	8
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	9
Introduction.....	9
A changing global educational context	9
The changing educational landscape – the global stage	10
The changing educational landscape – the New Zealand stage.....	11
An emerging discourse.....	12
An emerging discourse from the past: <i>Calling</i>	15
Calling: Meanings	15
Calling: Origins	16
Calling: Contextual influences.....	16
Calling: Emotions.....	18
Calling: Ethics and morality.....	18
Calling: Spirituality	19
Calling: An evolving, dynamic experience	20

Summary	21
Chapter Three: Research Design	23
Introduction.....	23
Qualitative, interpretive approach.....	23
Interpretive paradigm	24
Qualitative research	25
Research approach – case study	26
Research techniques.....	27
Interviews	28
Interview questions	28
Piloting the questions.....	29
Conducting the interviews.....	30
Participants.....	31
Data analysis.....	31
Ethical procedures adopted for the study	32
Other ethical concerns relevant to the research	32
Cultural considerations	33
Conclusion.....	33
Chapter Four: Research Findings.....	34
Introduction.....	34
Cases	34
Case 1: Elizabeth’s story	34
Case 2: Samantha’s story.....	36
Case 3: Daisy’s story	37
Case 4: Thelma’s story	38
Case 5: Judith’s story	40
Case 6: Kelly’s story	41
Case 7: Susan’s story.....	42

Emerging Themes	44
Origins of the calling – internal and external	44
Internal Promptings	44
External promptings	45
Called to support and advocate	45
Calling as supporting and empowering	46
Calling as a means of caring.....	46
Calling as being hope-full: inspiring, satisfying	47
Calling experienced as patterns and metaphors.....	48
Calling sustained through relationships with critical friends and mentors ..	49
Summary	50
Chapter Five: Discussion	51
Introduction.....	51
Perceptions of the calling: Calling as a lived experience	52
Calling experienced as being hope-full and satisfying	52
Called to care, support and advocate	53
Called to empower colleagues and families.....	56
Called to care for the community	57
Origins of the calling	58
Internal promptings	58
Crossroads of internal promptings and external invitations	60
Calling: A spiritual experience.....	63
Calling experienced as patterns and metaphors.....	64
Calling experienced as returning to the original sphere of one’s vocation ..	67
Calling sustained through relationships with critical friends and mentors ..	68
Summary	69
Chapter Six: Conclusion	72
Introduction.....	72

Argument of the thesis	72
Significant findings	72
Calling: Internal promptings and external invitations.....	72
Calling: Care, support and advocacy	73
Calling: Understood and lived	73
Calling: Perceived and lived as a spiritual experience	74
Calling: Experienced as patterns and metaphors	75
Calling: Sustained through relationships.....	75
Calling: Expressed through figurative language.....	75
Implications	76
Recommendations for further research	78
The strengths and limitations of this study	79
Concluding comments.....	80
List of References	82
Appendices	89
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	89
APPENDIX B: Invitation/Participant Information Sheet	91
Project Title	91
An Invitation	91
What is the purpose of this research?.....	91
How was I chosen for this invitation?	91
What will happen in this research?	92
What are the discomforts and risks and how will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?.....	92
What are the benefits?	92
What are the costs of participating in this research?.....	92
What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?	93
How do I agree to participate in this research?	93

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?	93
What do I do if I have concerns about this research?	93
Whom do I contact for further information about this research?.....	93
APPENDIX C: Participant Consent Form	94
Consent Form	94

Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Susie Kung

Date: 29 April 2011

Acknowledgements

There is something mysterious, fascinating and life-giving about teaching. I have been drawn to teaching since I was very young and that inner desire to teach has been nurtured by a family who understood the potent place of education in realizing a person's dream. I am thankful to my parents for gifting to the world five daughters who responded to the call to teach. At a time and place where daughters were not necessarily given opportunities to be educated, my parents had the foresight to send all their five daughters to school. This thesis is a tribute to all the hard times they had to endure to educate their five daughters.

I am also very thankful for the support, encouragement and patience unconditionally given by my best friend and husband, Raymond. Thank you for understanding why I needed to embark on this thesis at this silver time of my life. Thank you for taking over the family housework, for being my steady rock and for helping with the proof reading. I wouldn't have completed this MEd thesis without your unfailing love and support. A word of appreciation needs to be conveyed to my two children, Faith and Joshua. Faith, for the generous use of your home as a quiet writer's retreat, where the best part of my writing took place. Joshua, for encouraging me in times of doubt, and for those thought-provoking conversations which helped clarify my thinking.

I am deeply indebted to my primary supervisor, Nicola Chisnall, for your wisdom, care, guidance and support throughout a long thesis journey. You modelled what it means to be a good, kind, caring and gracious educator. Thank you for running the race beside me: for cheering me on, for patiently reading draft after draft of pieces of my thesis report, for helping me make sense of my writing and, above all, for staying the distance. This is a testimony to the exceptional mentor that you are. I will always remember and appreciate the kind and gentle rod that you use to guide this novice researcher safely through this thesis journey.

My sincere and heartfelt gratitude goes to Dr. David Giles, who began my thesis journey with me as my primary supervisor and continued as my critical friend even after he had left for the University of Waikato and, recently, the University of Flinders, Adelaide, Australia. Thank you for showing me what it means to teach from the heart, for believing in me, for helping me stand tall and for the unfailing support that crosses over time and space. Your life-giving ways, invaluable feedback, insightful guidance,

and, above all, your steady steering of this research project, have helped brought this thesis home to port.

I would like to record a special thank you to Dr. Andy Begg who provided me with advice, support and guidance at significant moments of my thesis writing. The thorough and thought-provoking feedback has strengthened this thesis. Your contribution has made a difference to both the final outcome of this thesis and my growing confidence in research.

I am especially indebted to the participants of this research for opening their hearts to this research project. Their hopeful stories on a teacher's calling are beacons that illuminate the heart of early childhood teaching. I am also thankful to them for providing an opportunity for all involved in education to view the teachers' world from the inside out. Their heartfelt stories form the core of this research project and acts as an inspiration to all in education.

I would also like to record my thanks to all the lecturers who have taught me throughout my postgraduate studies at AUT University. You have grown me into a thinking teacher who teaches out of a heart that cares. This thesis is the culmination of my postgraduate studies and you have all influenced this thesis in one way or another.

This research has been supported by AUT University through the provision of the Masters Thesis Scholarship, 2009 and the Lenova Laptop Scholarship, 2010. Your generosity has enabled me to complete this thesis. I would also like to thank AUTEK (The AUT Ethics Committee) for approving this research project which has been conducted in accord with the ethics approval gained on 23 March 2009, Ethics Application Number, 08/45.

This thesis also could not have been completed without the support and encouragement of my many "cheer leaders" from AUT University and Manukau Institute of Technology. Thank you for believing in me, for encouraging me when the well went dry, for celebrating every small milestone and also for just being "present" in my life.

A final acknowledgement goes to my sister, Nancy Kung, a former lecturer from AUT University, who passed on in 2008 doing what she loved best, teaching! This thesis is dedicated to you. We both share a common passion for teaching and her spirit lives on in this thesis and also as I continue to advocate for the personal in teaching.

Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of concern

The examination of teachers' choice of profession is gathering momentum but understanding how this choice is experienced as a *calling* is limited. My study found there is some literature on the teacher's *calling* from overseas but there has been no research undertaken on the early childhood teacher's *calling* in New Zealand.

I was drawn to this topic due to my interest in what makes early childhood teachers in New Zealand enter the profession, how they respond to a *call to teach* and how that *call* is sustained and experienced over time. It was my feeling that such research would provide a new dimension in our conversations surrounding teacher motivation, teacher well-being and teacher retention. There is considerable literature on the increasing threats to teachers' well-being both in New Zealand and globally. Teachers reported high levels of stress and a lack of well-being. Sources of stress included burnout and disillusionment (Fenech, Waniganayake & Fleet, 2009; Gibbs, 2002; Korthagen, 2004) and pressures arising from societal changes, the movement towards standards and increasing accountability in education (Clandinin, Downey & Huber, 2009), all of which contribute to teachers leaving the profession. Fenech et al., (2009) cites writers (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Elliot, 2006; Sumsion, 2005; Warrilow, et al., 2002; Watson, 2006) who consider early childhood teaching a marginalised profession from an industrial relations perspective where, in comparison to their primary and secondary counterparts, early childhood teachers receive relatively low wages, work under poorer working conditions and are accorded lower professional status. Their study confirms similar perceptions of early childhood teaching. It is also perceived as a 'marginalised profession' with lower wages and poorer working conditions and this perception has led to staff turnover and dissatisfaction (Fenech et al., 2009). There is a growing body of research which indicates an inter-relationship between teacher burnout and retention with a personal disillusionment and loss of ideals and meaning in the work that they do (Giles, 2006; Korthagen, 2004).

It is envisaged that a study on how teachers sustain a *call to teach* in a complex, and dynamic world of professional practice might add to the dialogue around the teaching self, teacher well-being, teacher satisfaction and teacher retention. This might also

encourage a reconceptualisation of the way we recruit, select, prepare and keep teachers in the profession.

In light of the above, this study was underpinned by the following research question:

What is the nature and experience of the call to teach for New Zealand early childhood teachers and teacher educators?

The development of my interest in the teacher's calling

I cannot pinpoint the exact moment in time when my interest in a teacher's *calling* began but I recognise that my appointment as a Vice Principal and subsequently the Acting Principal of a secondary school in Malaysia caused me to make a significant pause in my teaching life to inquire why teachers choose to teach and what keeps them in the profession in challenging circumstances. I will never forget observing a teacher teaching for appraisal purposes and I wondered which was worse: a teacher who has content knowledge but does not make any attempt to engage in meaningful relationships with the students, or a teacher who lacks content knowledge but engages the students in dynamic conversations that brings life to the teaching-learning space? The management team at this school struggled with the budget provided by the Ministry of Education, and the salaries provided for the teachers was definitely lower than that offered to graduates in other professions. The ministry, in an effort to improve teaching and learning, provided schools with computers; which was something quite exciting in the early 1990's. That did not motivate our teachers to teach any better or engage with their profession in a more meaningful way. That got me realising that what makes an effective teacher is not technology nor more in-service training or even higher salaries (the government did make some moves to increase the teachers salaries with not many visible signs of increased motivation in the teachers); but I had an inkling that the teachers lacked 'teacher presence' because they lacked a sense of who they are as teachers. I had the impression that the teaching self was absent but education in Malaysia at that point was more about training teachers to be effective dispensers of knowledge and, though I recognised that something was wrong in the way we were preparing our teachers for teaching, I felt I was an insignificant counter voice to the dominant education force at that time.

My interest in a teacher's *calling* is closely related to my belief that teachers teach out of who they are (Palmer, 1998) but I had little opportunity in Malaysia to validate this belief. This opportunity came when I enrolled in a Certificate in Tertiary Teaching course in New Zealand and was introduced to the writings of Parker Palmer by a

lecturer who inspired me with his teaching and his way of being. He gave me the confidence to believe in the inner self: the source of all good teaching. He modelled what it means to keep close to a good understanding of who we are and the result was confident teaching and a passion for what he taught (Gibbs, 2006; Palmer, 1998; 2004). This desire to know more about teacher identity and how it is related to effective teaching is central to my research endeavours.

My interest in teacher's *calling* was further fuelled when I began my postgraduate studies with the School of Education at AUT (Auckland University of Technology). Firstly, I met lecturers who modelled teacher presence and as I enrolled in more courses and got to know individual lecturers better, I recognised that they taught from a self-knowledge that opened opportunities for students to get to know their inner beings better. I still remember lecturers who showed such passion in their work and subject matter. I began to recognise that their passion arose out of their inner selves and teaching that works occurs when the lecturer passes on their passion to their students. One such lecturer allowed us the space to challenge her beliefs and passion for Montessori teaching and that safe space for dialogue allowed a special connection. I am now quite convinced of the Montessori way and it has become part of my teaching self. I am thankful for the opportunities to grow my passion and teaching self through my postgraduate studies.

Another significant season in my life happened when I was teaching in a small private college and found the teaching environment the most challenging in all my years as a teacher. It was opportune that at this same time, I was introduced to a relatively new approach to research called Appreciative Inquiry in a research methodology course. The lecturer encouraged me to use this new lens to view what I had called the desert stricken landscape of my teaching at that time. By using the Appreciative Inquiry methodology (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), I was able to find positive teaching stories from my past to rejuvenate my practice. I was able to conclude on a personal level that what changes practice is not another theory but the teacher's ability to recognise that transformation requires not so much seeking new opportunities but in having new appreciative eyes to view the current circumstances (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). It dawned on me that the ability to view things differently depends on a teacher's ability to access his/her inner self and trust it to guide and evaluate situations and point him/her in the right direction (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). A reading paper was my last paper before embarking on this research study. It has also contributed to my research

journey and provided me with a new lens to examine the phenomenon of a calling. My lecturer encouraged me to read literature that provided alternative perspectives on education and pointed me to literature that talked about teacher presence and the art of teaching which requires meditation and introspection.

I began to take note that there were others like me, clamouring for transformation in education with a call to return to the essence of a more humanistic tradition to teaching (Giles, 2006; Hansen, 2001; 1995; Snook, 2003). I was encouraged to join the rising call for alternative holistic education which advocates for the personal in teaching. This new paradigm in education encourages educators and researchers to provide teachers with a voice to rediscover who they are and what they stand for. These conversations are not to remain personal dialogues as educators need to help provide a platform for teachers' personal voices to be heard in public discourses on education as well as consulted in reforms made to education. As part of this counter educational discourse, I began to notice a revival in the language and concept of a *call to teach* and vocation when teachers talk about their work (Buskit, Benson & Sikoski, 2005; Casbon, Shagoury & Smith, 2005; Durka, 2002; Estola, Erkkila & Syrjala, 2003; Hansen, 1995; Joldersma, 2006; Sykes, 2003). This prompted me to consider researching teachers who describe their work as a *calling* and/or a vocation. I appreciated that if teachers choose to describe their work as a *calling* or vocation, this should be taken be acknowledged. This encouraged me to listen to the voice of the teachers and explore how teachers who perceive their choice of profession as a *calling* understand it and experience it in the real world of practice.

I believed that my research would provide teachers with an additional platform to tell their authentic stories about the work they do. Their narratives of experiences of feeling *called to teach*, both the positive stories and the challenging ones, need to be told so that the public, policy makers, educators at large, and the teachers themselves, know and hopefully understand what motivates a person to answer the *call to teach* in the first place, and what sustains them in a complex and ever-shifting landscape of a teacher's world.

I envisaged this research as having the potential to provide some insight into teacher motivation, teacher satisfaction and teacher retention. This is critical because of the increasing indications that teachers' well-being is under threat and that poor teacher retention is due to high levels of stress, burnout and a loss of engagement and

meaningfulness with the work that they do (Brown, 2009; Chater, 2005; Clandinin, et al., 2009; Korthagen, 2004).

As a teacher educator, I am concerned by the dominant view of teaching as a skilled, competency-based profession (Chater, 2005; Codd, 1998; Snook, 1998). This goes against the more humanistic view of teaching as a human experience based on meaningful relationships and the notion that the teaching self is central to teaching (Giles, 2006; Glazer, 1999; Palmer, 1998). I currently teach a course entitled, *Philosophy in Action*, which provides student teachers with the opportunity to examine the teaching self who teaches and how their beliefs about early childhood teaching relate to practice. I believe that the findings of this study will further encourage discourse on the controversy between a competency-based view of teachers (that focuses on outcomes) and the alternate view that sees the teaching self as central to teaching (which brings the personal into teaching and endorses the more individual characteristics of the teacher).

Significance of the study

This study aimed to help bridge the gap between general studies on teachers' *calling* and a specific study of New Zealand early childhood teachers' *calling*. An understanding of a teacher's perception and experiences of a *call to teach* over time was seen as providing educators, educational researchers, policy makers, as well as early childhood teachers a view to teacher motivation and teacher satisfaction. An understanding of why and how teachers remain in the teaching profession despite challenging work environments is deemed useful both for the recruitment and retention of teachers. It was also envisaged that this study would provide some early childhood teachers with the opportunity to tell their stories. By using semi-structured interviews, with a discursive style, the teachers' authentic voices were captured. Thus, spaces were created which provided the teachers with the opportunity to talk about their private aspirations and the public realities of living a *calling*. This study thus provided some teachers with an opportunity to actively engage with their *calling* and affirm that their *calling* is experienced at a deeply personal and emotional level. In telling their stories, the teachers gained a public voice for their profession. Most importantly, the study aimed to highlight the altruistic nature of early childhood teaching and the way that the profession attracts people with unique and innate qualities.

The context of the study

The global educational context

The current global educational context reflects educational policies and practices which continue to be influenced by an economic rationalist ideology (Codd, 1999; Giles, 2008; O'Neill, 1998). Educational pedagogy and practices are increasingly being defined with a technocratic rationalist language in the name of greater economic efficiency, greater regulation and accountability (Brown, 2009; Collins, 1998). The problem with this reductionist view of the teacher is that it has a preoccupation with the application of a teaching technique in contrast to the perception of education as a human experience (Collins, 1998). Clandinin et al. (2009) note that many teachers are leaving the profession because of an over emphasis on techniques, which focuses on the content and method of teaching but does not allow teachers with opportunities to continually discover who they are and what they stand for.

Goodfellow (2008) and Brown (2009) also argue that the technical rational perspective has brought along with it an increasingly intensive regulatory environment where there is a focus on technical competence. Goodfellow (2008) believes that the teacher's practical wisdom then becomes subsumed by regulation and managerial regimes. Chater (2005) also suggested that a teacher's sense of vocation is threatened by bureaucratisation which leads to a perceived loss of autonomy, meaning and control; an environment of mistrust; as well as high levels of exhaustion, frustration or anxiety. Over-regulation of education translates into misalignment between the teacher's personal beliefs about teaching and the education system's pursuit of less humanistic social and economic goals. It is of interest to me how teachers understand and experience their *call to teach* within such challenging educational environments.

The New Zealand educational context

New Zealand education is not spared from this economic rationalist ideology. Thus, the traditional view that education is a human experience (Collins, 1998) and a more humanistic perception of teachers as professionals who gain satisfaction from working collaboratively to create a community of learners (Giles, 2006; 2008) is lost in this new culture based primarily on commercialisation, business and competition where people are reduced to commodities (O'Neill, 1998). In the past the outcome of education was considered a public good but education is now perceived as business transaction, a product which can be bought and sold. Thus, the teacher's objective is to help

realise the economic potential of the learner (Giles, 2008). As education was reconceptualised, it began to mirror the world of economics and, with that, the educator's role also took on a new form. The educator became the supplier, controller and objective evaluator of a students' learning (Codd, 1999).

A number of educationalists in New Zealand have called for a rejection of this ideological position in education. Education must not be a business transaction (Codd, 1998; Snook, 2003). They have proposed that the crisis in education and teacher education in New Zealand is that there seems a lack of concern for education as a public good. With the technicist orientation dominating the education arena, there is an absence of any alternative discourse on education (Codd, 1990; Giles, 2008). There has lately been a call for a greater humanizing concern in education (Giles, 2008; Snook, 2003).

An overview of the research

Amidst this dismal educational environment there is a counter educational discourse from overseas; a revival in the language and concept of a *call to teach* and vocation when teachers describe their work (Buskit et al., 2005; Cammock, 2009; Casbon, et al., 2005; Durka, 2002; Estola et al., 2003; Hansen, 1995; 2001; 2002; Joldersma, 2006; Mayes, 2005; Palmer, 1998; Sykes, 2003). Palmer (1998) explains that vocation needs to be experienced as a *calling* and that it comes both from experiences in the world and a response to the inner promptings of the heart and the mind (Palmer 2000). More recent studies have captured a glimpse of a change in language in teachers' discourses about their work, indicative of a voice from the past, with many teachers describing their work as a vocation (Chater, 2005; Cossentino, 2006; Estola et al., 2003; Game & Metcalfe, 2008; Palmer, 2000). This study is partly a response to the call to researchers to take serious note that teachers are beginning to use a different language to describe their work and 'vocation' is often used to describe their profession (Estola et al., 2003). It has been suggested that this increasing use of 'vocation' may indicate a *call* back to historical (Hansen, 1994) and religious traditions (Cammock, 2009; Emmet, 1958, cited by Estola et al., 2003; Palmer, 2000) implying self-sacrifice and a *call* to service (Cammock, 2009; Hansen, 1994; 1995) with an ethical orientation to work (Durka, 2002; Game & Metcalfe, 2008; Hansen, 1995) arising from inner motivations (Cammock, 2009; Durka, 2002). This research is my endeavour to understand what this change in language means to the teacher's *calling* and the teacher's work.

In terms of this research how teachers, as noted by Giles (2008), there appears in New Zealand, a lack of any alternative discourse on education in general and an absence of dialogue surrounding the wellbeing of early childhood teachers within such challenging educational landscapes. This prompted me to embark on this inquiry. It was motivated by a desire to know how teachers who perceive the work that they do, both as a vocation and calling, experience teaching in the current educational landscapes.

Using a case study approach, participants who self-identified as having experienced a *call to teach*, and who were New Zealand early childhood teachers/teacher educators, were invited to share their stories of the nature of their *call* and their experiences that show their interrelationship with such a *call*. Qualitative methodologies have been used for their appropriateness for this research because the data obtained, that is, the teachers' experiences of a *call to teach*, is complex and human behaviour, thoughts and feelings can only be understood in real life situations (Gillham, 2000). Understanding a teacher's *calling* involves understanding the meanings, beliefs and experiences of such (Wisker, 2001). The teachers' stories provided data, which opened the nature of the interrelationship between a teacher and his/her *call*. Personal stories are subjective in nature, revealing the individuality of a teacher's awareness of the *call*, the origins of this *call*, the influence of the *call*, and possible interrelationships between their practice and this '*call*' (Carson, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2000).

An overview of the thesis

There are six chapters in this thesis. In this chapter, I have introduced the thesis and stated why I am interested in researching the New Zealand early childhood teacher's *call to teach*. The second chapter is a review of literature which examines the perceptions and experiences of a teacher's *calling*. The third chapter presents the research design for this study. This includes the research methodology, methods, and ethical considerations that are integral to the research process. The fourth chapter presents the research findings that illustrate the themes and ideas that have emerged as a result of the data gathering. The fifth chapter is a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature. Lastly, the conclusion summarises my research, outlines the limitations of this study, provides suggestions for future research, and presents recommendations that might further understandings of the co-relationship between a teacher's perceptions of the *calling*, and how that *calling* is sustained over time.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review guided the scope of my inquiry on a teacher's *calling*. The review begins with a brief examination of the changing educational context, both globally and in New Zealand, and the changing educational discourse in response to this change. It then moves to a consideration of an alternative discourse on a more holistic approach to education affirming the view that the teachers' inner lives, including their sense of vocation and *calling*, are worthy of examination and public discourse. This review concludes with a consideration of existing literature on teachers' perceptions and experiences of their *call to teach*. This literature review is an attempt to uncover existing knowledge on teachers' choice of profession so as to identify aspects of teachers' *calling* which require further examination or clarification.

A changing global educational context

An examination of educational context indicates that educational policy is shaped by an economic rationalist ideology. Educational pedagogy and practices are increasingly defined within a technocratic rationalist language, all in the name of greater economic efficiency, regulation and accountability (Brown, 2009; Codd, 1998; Collins, 1998; O'Neill, 1998). Economic globalization has come to influence the content, organisation, and practice of teaching (Clandinin, et al., 2009; O'Neill, 1998). There is a view that education has become too narrow and technicist, where method overrides content (Codd, 1998; Snook, 1998). This technocratic-reductionist view of the teacher as a skilled technician goes against more humanistic views of teachers as professionals who gain satisfaction from working collaboratively to create a community of learners (Giles; 2005; 2006; 2007). In addition, it is proposed that a preoccupation with the application of teaching techniques is in contrast to the perception of education as a human experience (Collins, 1998).

Goodfellow (2008) and Brown (2009) argue the technical rational perspective has brought an increasingly intensive regulatory environment with an emphasis on technical competence. The outcome of this is that teacher's practical knowledge becomes subsumed by regulation and managerial regimes (Goodfellow, 2008). In this, teachers' sense of vocation is threatened by bureaucratisation which leads to extreme dissatisfaction and perceptions of loss of autonomy (Chater, 2005). This over-regulation of education has translated into an increasing sense of misalignment between teachers'

personal beliefs about teaching and the education system's pursuit of social and economic goals which are less humanistic friendly. All this literature suggests that this is detrimental to teacher well-being (Chater, 2005; Palmer, 2004; 2000, 1998). It was of interest with this research to find out how teachers, specifically New Zealand early childhood teachers, understand and experience their call to teach within such challenging educational environments.

The changing educational landscape – the global stage

There is a growing body of research which indicates an inter-relationship between teacher burnout and retention with a personal disillusionment and loss of ideals and meaningfulness at work (Korthagen, 2004; Giles, 2006). Fenech, et al. (2009) attribute burnout, staff turnover and dissatisfaction to lower wages, heavy workloads, a lack of time to fulfil multiple responsibilities and overwhelming administrative duties.

A study conducted by Clandinin et al. (2009) pointed to some places in Canada where there are increasing numbers of teachers leaving after only a few years of teaching. They note the effects of changing environments as a result of “globalisation, refugee populations, immigration, demographics, economic disparities and environmental changes” (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 145) on teacher stress and retention. Another possible cause for poor teacher retention is the tension caused by a misalignment between private aspirations/personal beliefs and the prevailing challenging educational atmosphere (Chater, 2005; Palmer, 2004; Palmer, 1998; Estola et al., 2003). Clandinin et al., (2009, p. 145) posed this thought-provoking question, “Were the ways they (the teachers) found themselves composing their teaching lives so contradictory to their imagined teaching lives that leaving was the most acceptable response?”

The changing educational landscape alters the landscape of teaching. An increased focus on standardised accountability in current educational landscape is another source of stress and pressure for teachers (Clandinin et al., 2009). Teachers talk about difficulties in aligning personal *calling* and professional responsibility (Chater, 2005). It is proposed that in seeking congruency between these two selves, teachers need trusting spaces for dialogue (Palmer, 2004) to make meaning of their experiences and to grow from them. It is suggested that an environment which promotes excellence and fear of mistakes, engendered by stipulated agency inspection, cannot help teachers to mature in their discourses but rather causes unnecessary fear and anxiety (Chater, 2005).

A study completed in the United Kingdom on teachers' vocations and values revealed several factors that threatened the teachers' initial sense of *vocation*. This includes "exhaustion, loss of control over one's working life, a sense of losing meaning ... and, in a few cases, extreme frustration or extreme anxiety (Chater, 2005, p. 255). A study completed in Finland by Estola et al. (2003) echoes the same concern, and concluded that teachers seek to enjoy their work in increasingly difficult conditions. Estola's (2003) study confirms the perception that the early childhood teaching work environment is stressful and can lead to burnout.

Early childhood education is not spared of this technical perspective. Goodfellow (2008) and Brown (2009) see one of the main challenges to the early childhood practitioner is the perspective which supports an increasingly intensive regulatory environment where there is an emphasis on technical competence. Early childhood teachers are seen as technicians, where autonomy is subordinated to increasing managerial regimes. Further, this perspective supports an increasingly intensive regulatory environment where there is an emphasis on technical competency and observable and measurable performances. Brown (2009) also laments that early childhood education in the United States has become more regulated through a range of education reforms and mandates. Teachers are required to adhere to high stakes accountability policies and this signals a new framework where early childhood centres are more accountable to their clients for the provision of quality education.

There are overwhelming indicators from overseas that all is not necessarily well with the teacher's world due to external forms of control and regulation, societal changes, as well as, unease due to misalignments between personal expectations of teaching and professional requirements of the job as stipulated by policy makers.

The changing educational landscape – the New Zealand stage

Like its global counterparts, educational policy in New Zealand continues to be shaped by an economic rationalist ideology. Educational pedagogy and practices are increasingly shaped by economic goals calling for greater economic efficiency, greater regulation and accountability (Brown, 2009; Codd, 1998; Collins, 1998; O'Neill, 1998).

The most recent challenge to the experience of education in New Zealand over the last 20 years has been the radical restructuring of the New Zealand public education system under the influence of the economic rationalist ideology (Billot, 2003). The New Right

ideology became the basis of widespread restructuring and institutional adjustment and reform in New Zealand's education system (Billot, 2003; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003; Codd, 1998). With this is a shift in the view of education as a public good to that of personal gain (Giles, 2008; Codd, 1998). The official outcome of education has moved from that of an educated citizen to that of an equipped and skilled worker (Ministry of Education, 1993). The introduction of this ideology has changed New Zealand's educational landscape. Education has been officially reconceptualised as an economic transaction which requires greater management, accountability and regulation (Thrupp & Wilmont, 2003).

There are increasing concerns that teachers work in an academic culture which alienates the teacher's sense of his/her personal self and practice (Giles, 2006; Giles & Kung, 2010; Palmer, 1998). Chater's (2005) study discovered that there is a sense of misalignment between teachers' personal beliefs about teaching and the education systems pursuit of social and economic goals which are less humanistic friendly and detrimental to teacher well-being. Can a culture emerge that has real presence and a deep felt understanding of what it means to interact and remain engaged with the world (Giles, 2005, 2006; Glazer, 1994)? Palmer (1998) reminds us that teachers' sense of vocation is necessary to keep the passion for their work alive.

An emerging discourse

This changing and challenging educational context has given rise to call for a counter educational discourse both in New Zealand and overseas. There appears to be an emerging discourse arising from a growing interest in holistic alternative education (Clandinin et al., 2009; Estola, 2003; Gibbs, 2006; Glazer, 1994; Giles & Kung, 2010; Hansen, 1995; Intrator, 2005; Intrator & Scribner, 2003; Korthagen, 2004; Noddings, 2001; 1995; Palmer, 2004; 2000; 1998; Shelby, 2003; Snook, 2003). All these writers appeal for a change in the way teachers and teaching is perceived, advocating for the personal in teaching. Teacher educators are encouraged to provide teachers with the voice to rediscover who they are and what they stand for (Clandinin et al., 2009), and to provide a platform for their voices to be heard in public discourses on education as well as consulted in reforms made to education (Chater, 2005; Clandinin et al., 2009; Court, Merav & Ornan, 2009; Estola et al., 2003; Malm, 2004; Rivalland, 2007).

I follow with interest this emerging interest with the 'teaching self'. Chater (2005) drew our attention to the challenge faced by teachers who struggle with a sense of

misalignment between personal and professional identities. Their stories reflect a discord between private aspirations and public realities and dominant also in teachers' conversations is how their idealism about teaching gives way to cynicism when faced with the realities of teaching. Student teachers too recognised the contradiction between what they consider good and desirable and the acceptable official definition of what teacherhood is (Estola, 2003). This sense of unease is affirmed by the view that teachers' inner lives, including their sense of vocation, and their emotional state, is what counts in transforming the profession (Palmer, 1999). Chater (2005) while proposing that the teacher's public voice needs to be heard, maintains that what is more crucial is helping teachers retain their personal voice.

Snook (2003) and Giles (2008) advocate for the personal side to teaching and the ethics that support this. Snook (2003) drew our attention to a growing body of literature which endorses the belief that the personal is pivotal to the act of teaching. He pointed out that in reality the teacher's personality intrudes on teaching experiences and the teacher's interactions at every point. He examined what he called the 'ethic of being' or 'virtue ethics' which places an emphasis on personal qualities like "kindness, honesty, gentleness and humility" (p. 78).

Snook (2003) reminded educators that in taking responsibility for learners' learning, teachers are not to be dispensers of knowledge but to respect the learner's autonomy and respect for his/her ability to reason. Vanderstraeten and Biesta (2006) echoed a similar ethics to education when they insist that the aim of education is to educate a person towards freedom.

In line with the dialogue around the personal nature of teaching, Palmer (2000; 1998; 1983) consistently draws attention to the need for teachers to know themselves first before looking into acquiring skills and techniques to enhance teaching. More recently, Palmer (2004) encouraged teachers to imprint their identity on their teaching by authoring a new and creative way of teaching by first being true to who they are. Korthagen's (2004) exploration of teacher's professional identity in teacher education arrived at the same conclusion; that teacher education needs to begin by exploring the 'teaching self'. He acknowledged that this area has received little attention from researchers but points to studies done by both Tickle (1999 & 2000) and Nias (1989), both cited by Korthagen, (2004), which concludes that self-concepts and core values are

a source of stability for teachers, through which a sense of purpose and mission in their work is maintained.

Chater (2005), Estola, et al., (2003) and Hargreaves (2001) concur that teaching is an emotional endeavour. This emotional aspect of the teacher's life is captured in the language they use when describing their work life. Teachers refer to the pleasure of working in their narratives while acknowledging that the increasing difficult conditions have been obstacles to their enjoyment of their profession (Estola, et al., 2003). Estola's (2003) study concluded that there is a connection between hope and student teachers' experiences of teaching, and advocates for the transmission of a hopeful spirit from teachers to students with a focus on doing good and retaining a sense of hope. This is in keeping with Hansen's (1998) *call* that hope is a central aspect of teaching and that one of the aspirations for teachers should be to hear the voice of hope.

Goodfellow (2008) explores the phenomenon of 'presence' and argues that it is a concept worthy of further investigation as a key component of quality childcare. She explains that 'presence' is situated with caring relationships and encompasses the heart and soul of the teacher's professional practice. She stresses further that while cognitive and social aspects of early childhood professional practice are important, 'presence' has the potential to significantly impact on children's emotional well-being. Noddings (1984) explains that 'presence' requires engrossment as well as being receptive to another. Engagement with children translates into a 'presence' that has a relational nature in which one makes oneself available to children by actively attending or listening to them (Goodfellow, 2008). This notion of being present to learners, as being engaged and attentive to learners, is endorsed by both Palmer (1998) and Gibbs (2006) alike.

There is a call to open up 'storied spaces' (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 152), opportunities given for teachers to tell their lived experiences and to move inquiry from superficial questions on content and techniques to deeper questions with a focus on rediscovering who teachers think they are and what they stand for (Clandinin et al., 2009; Palmer, 1998; 2004). There is a growing call to listen carefully to teachers' voices (Estola et al., 2003) because tuning into the teacher's own language gives access to a better understanding of the essence of their teacherhood from their own perspectives. Clandinin et al. (2009) suggests a range of spaces for the teacher's voice to be heard. This includes 'storied spaces' which provide opportunities for teachers' stories, even the

hard to tell conflicting stories in teaching, to be told. A group of educators (Intrator, 2005; Intrator & Scribner, 2003; Palmer, 2004; 2000; 1998) propose the setting up of 'circles of trust' (Palmer, 2004, p. 66) as a means for the teachers' voice to be heard in safe psycho-emotional spaces for dialogue and meaning-making.

An emerging discourse from the past: *Calling*

Recent studies have captured a glimpse of a change in language in teachers' discourses about their work. There appears to be an emerging discourse, indicative of a voice from the past, with many teachers describing their work as a vocation or a *call to teach* (Cammock, 2009; Buskit et al., 2005; Casbon et al., 2005; Hansen, 1995; 2001; Joldersma, 2006; Mayes, 2005; Palmer, 1998; Sykes, 2003). There is a suggestion that if teachers choose to describe their work as vocation, researchers need to take this into serious consideration (Chater, 2005; Cossentino, 2006; Estola et al., 2003; Game & Metcalfe, 2008, Palmer, 2000), endorsing a closer examination of a teacher's *call to teach* (Charter, 2005; Cossentino, 2006; Court et al., 2009; Estola et al., 2003; Game & Metcalfe, 2008; Hansen, 1995; Mayes, 2002; 2005; Palmer, 2000; 1998). Palmer (2000) forewarns that there might be a need to refigure teaching as a *calling* suggesting that there might be a paradigm shift in current perceptions of the teacher's choice of profession. So, why do teachers feel *called to teach* despite growing signals that all is not necessarily well in the education arena?

Calling: Meanings

Calling as a construct is multifaceted and complex. Cammock (2009) suggests that it has two distinct parts: the first involves discovering one's unique gifts and talents; the second involves recognising means by which to use these gifts and talents in serving others. He concurs with Palmer (2004; 2000; 1998) when he advocates for an alignment between doing things that both feel right for *self* and the world at exactly the same time. This service-oriented dimension of a *calling* is echoed in the findings of Court et al. (2009) study, where participants perceived the teacher's role as helping children fulfil their unique personal potential which would in turn lead to the creation of a better society.

Cammock (2009) and Palmer (2004; 2000; 1998) have acknowledged that an understanding of a teacher's *calling* requires the ability to identify one's strengths based on an understanding of who we are, what we value and our place in the world. These educators argue that living a *calling* entails the ability to form meaningful

intraconnections with “self” and interconnections with others (Devito, Rourke & O’Neill, 2000). The importance of connecting with self and others/world are endorsed by a growing number of educators (Gibbs, 2006; Giles, 2008; 2004; Giles & Kung, 2010; Palmer,1998) who concur that teachers need to weave meaningful connections between self, subject matter, the students and the world at large. They agree the premise of such connections lies in the teacher’s ability to access their ‘inner self’ so as to be able to engage in relationships with their learners. It would appear the teacher’s ability to access his/her inner self is foundational to the recognition of one’s *calling to teach*.

Calling: Origins

There have been attempts made at examining the origins of a teacher’s *calling* (Cammock, 2009; Mayes, 2002). While there is a claim that “a *calling* is generally thought to represent an inner urge or prompting that compels an individual to undertake a specific course of action” (Buskist et al., 2005, p. 112), there are others who believe a *calling* arises from something outside the teacher (Court et al., 2009; Estola et al., 2003; Mayes, 2002). There is another perception of *calling* as an intersection of a personal response from within oneself and an invitation from external circumstances. It is deemed to arise from an internal desire to use one’s uniqueness and passion in response to a perceived external invitation in the service of others. This sense of “duty” links a teacher to the larger world community where self interest takes a back seat and a spirit of common good prevails. The *calling* thus understood, acts as a crucial connection between the individual and the public (Cammock, 2009).

Sykes (2003) cautions that teaching is a special *calling* that requires a good job fit between the disposition of the teacher and the requirements of a unique profession. Others consider preschool teachers as altruistic individuals and the teaching vocation gives them the means to express their personality and engage their personal style of interaction with the environment (Holland, 1985; Roe, 1957, cited by Court et al., 2009).

Calling: Contextual influences

The teaching profession appears to draw some people to the profession (Buskit, et al., 2005; Cammock, 2009; Hansen, 1995; Mayes, 2002). Hansen (1995) examined how a person perceives, or hears the *call to teach* in the first place and concluded that the teaching practice acts as the caller, inviting the person to meet his/her obligations. Buskit, et al. (2005), concur when they suggest that the *call* represents a prompting,

urging the individual to respond and experience the *call* in practice; and for some this response is seen as a duty/obligation to serve others (Cammock, 2009). Some teachers perceive their *calling* as a response to a call by children, and those teachers need to learn how to hear the children's call (Estola et al., 2003). There is thus a signal from the literature that an examination of a teacher's *calling* needs to be cognisant of the role of practice in helping teachers recognise a *call to teach*.

Court et al. (2009) highlights the individual and personal motivations that lead a person to a teaching career and identified personal history and family background as strong influences to teachers' choice of profession. The role of significant others apart from family members in influencing choice of profession, or the role played by significant others in helping teachers clarify and sustain that *call to teach*, deserves closer examination.

A significant finding from the Court et al.'s (2009) study related to the ongoing connection between the teacher's choice of career and perceptions of a teacher's role. The teachers interviewed for this study revealed a clear relationship between the reasons for choosing the profession and perceptions of the essence of their role. These teachers chose preschool teaching because of a desire to love, educate, nurture and foster the children under their care. This study suggests that there is a relationship between key events and a teacher's self and Court et al. (2009) cite a range of previous studies that support his findings (Carter, 1993; Kelchtermans, 1993; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, cited by Court et al., 2009). This is of significance because teachers' motivation for joining the profession will have a bearing on teacher satisfaction and teacher retention over time.

Mayes (2002) suggests that there needs for further research on the pedagogical, biographical and political dimensions of a teacher's *calling*. Estola et al. (2003) claim that vocation has multiple voices and is intricately intertwined with a teacher's view of life which is influenced by the tradition of education, and social, cultural and historical contexts. While contextual influences are a mediator for choice of profession, further examination of a teacher's *calling* needs to take into account Snook's (2003) suggestion that each individual's response to the *call to teach* is unique and personal to the individual, and there may be no universal features of a teacher's perception of his/her *calling*.

Calling: Emotions

When teachers spoke of being called to teach, they speak with energy, enthusiasm and passion of a love for teaching. It appears that those who view teaching as a *calling* derive abundant rewards from the profession. Most of these rewards involve the effects that teaching has on students (Estola et al., 2003). Making a positive difference in students' lives affirms teachers' belief that they are called to teach (Buskist et al., 2005; Palmer, 1998, Casbon et al., 2005; Intrator & Scribner, 2003). Estola et al., (2003) confirms that teaching involves feelings and that a teacher's connection with her students, and their successes, appear to validate the choice of profession. It is proposed that since teachers view their role as nurturers and that they work out of their love and concern for children's well-being, this will translate into a caring teaching posture. This emotional link between the teacher and learner must not be underestimated. Estola et al.'s (2003) study shows that success in teaching results in feelings of joy and pleasure while failure leads to feelings of disappointment, sadness, and sometimes, anger.

Calling: Ethics and morality

Literature also suggests that there is a rising assertion that there is an ethical and moral dimension to the teacher's *calling*. Estola et al.'s (2003) study on teacher's vocation concluded that vocation is a moral voice and this is translated into a form of caring profession (Estola et al., 2003). This foundational belief that teaching as a caring profession includes the ethics of relationships is supported by the literature (Ayers, 2001; Elbaz, 1992; Gibbs, 2006; Giles, 2008; 2007; Giles & Alderson, 2008; Giles & Kung, 2010; Noddings, 2001; Shelby, 2003; Snook, 2003; Palmer, 2004; 2000; 1998). The moral responsibility to care is translated into a duty to serve and this orientation to work is made visible in practice as a moral responsibility to defend children (Estola, et al., 2003).

Mayes (2005) offers an alternative view of the ethical teacher but still concurs that the ethics of teaching are rooted in care. Caring teachers are expected not only to share the struggles, pain and challenges of their learners but also to know how to tend to such "wounds" in themselves and others. Mayes (2005) refers to such teachers as spiritually-called teachers who are willing to face their own suffering and pain, to restore themselves so that they may help others do the same. Hansen (1994) points out that there is a religious undertone to this perception of vocation because such an interpretation requires a disregard of one's own needs and self-sacrifice. This ability to form an empathetic connection between teacher and learner (Palmer, 1997; 1998, 2004)

allows the teacher to be acutely ‘caring’ in his/her *calling*. Mayes (2005) agrees with Noddings (1995) when he advocates for the notion of teaching as ‘ontological care’ and declares that teachers are not only *called to teach* but their role invariably means a *call* to heal.

Snook (2003) provides a refreshing view into the moral responsibility of the teacher when he insists that teaching needs to move beyond mere articulations to an attitude of ‘walking the talk’. This requires an alignment between one’s articulation of values and one’s actions. The ethics promoted by Snook have to do with the teacher’s understanding of the ethical notions of respect for a person’s autonomy and their reasoning. While Snook (2003) places a value on the ethics of personal freedom and rights of the individual, Vanderstraeten and Biesta (2006) advocate for educating learners towards freedom in general. Korthagen (2004) moves further to suggest that the responsibility of the teacher is not only towards the development of a strong sense of self-worth in learners, but also to promote the development of great human beings who are able to contribute to society by having deep feelings of love and respect for people.

Calling: Spirituality

There appears to be a spiritual dimension to a teacher’s *call to teach*. Marshall (2009) examined the relationship between spirituality, choice of profession and spiritual preparedness for the profession. Her study is significant because it raises awareness that teachers who feel *called to teach* seem to have an internalised spiritual framework for thinking about teaching which includes spiritual concepts like meaning, purpose, connectedness and care. This signals the complexity of teaching and the need for a greater concern for the deep needs of a teacher’s soul, which includes their perception of feeling called to help others and their desire to stay connected with both learners and community at large, which ultimately brings meaning and purpose and satisfaction (Marshall, 2009).

Mayes (2005; 2002) concurs with Marshall’s (2009) call for a closer examination of the spiritual side of a teacher’s decision to teach, their way of teaching and their goals as teachers. Mayes (2002, p. 703) asserts that “major archetypes of the spirit” in teaching are rooted in “care” with an ultimate concern about those who look to them for guidance and insight. This spirit of care extends beyond relationship with students. Teachers see the spiritual side of their *calling* as a *call* to surrender themselves to something larger than themselves and to become what they were destined to be. He points out that this

meeting with something bigger and beyond ourselves can begin with a vocational *calling*. Cammock (2009) suggests that it is the spiritual aspect of a *calling* which provides teachers with an opportunity to connect with their unique purpose in life and a *calling* provides the way to that connection. Palmer (2000; 1998) and Cammock (2009) agree that there is an element that one's *calling* is predetermined and quite often times the denial of the *call* results in dire consequences.

It seems evident for some that the teaching profession entails a spiritual element and some literature suggests that it translates into religious notions of healing, sacrifice and serving others, there is also literature that describes spirituality in less religious undertones.

Calling: An evolving, dynamic experience

A teacher's professional practice is influenced by the changing nature of this *call to teach* over time (Intrator, 2005; Noddings, 2001; Palmer, 2000; 1998). Similarly, a teacher's *call to teach* is often spoken of as having a beginning alongside a deepening experiential sense of ownership and understanding (Sykes, 2003). Teachers at the outset of their career appear to focus on feelings and their instinct to serve as a teacher. They talked about their love for children while more experienced teachers talked more in terms of skills, content and teaching as a social good. Their sense of vocation appeared more grounded, more aware of professionalism and accountability. Does this mean that when teachers enter the profession, they are more idealistic in notions of their *calling* but the world of real practice modifies the *calling*? Should this move over time from the personal nature of teaching to that of the professional concern educators?

Another question worth examining is how teachers sustain this *call to teach* in the complex, dynamic, and uncertain world of professional practice? How do teachers experience their *call to teach* and how is this *call* influenced over time? There appears to be an ebb and flow in the *calling*. The language of *calling* seems to imply that a teacher's vocation evolves over time, is dynamic in process, and is shaped by practice (Estola et al., 2003). While some teachers appear true to the *calling*, there are others who lose sight of their *calling* when their *calling* seems unfulfilling (Casbon et al., 2005). Another sign that a *call* has lost its appeal is when teachers begin to wrestle with their practice. The teachers viewed their teaching life moving through twists and turns and reported doubts and crises over the course of their careers which are related to practice (Estola et al., 2003). In another study by Estola (2003), the findings signalled

the importance of helping teachers accept both the highs and lows of teaching while emphasising the importance of aiming to do good and sustaining a sense of hope in one's vocation. Estola's recommendation, that the key to resiliency is a sense of optimism and sense of self-worth, is worth pursuing

The dynamic nature of a teacher's *calling* is captured in the recommendation of Buskist et al. (2005) that to gain a better insight into teaching, we must have enough courage to explore and analyse the concept of vocation as a living concept instead of rejecting it as an obsolete and religious construct of the past. Thus, an investigation of how the *calling* may change over time is worthy of research. Few research projects have captured the voice of early childhood teachers/teacher educators about their *calling to teach*. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on a teacher's calling by exploring a relatively unexplored niche, the New Zealand early childhood teachers/teacher educators perceptions and experiences of their call to teach.

Summary

In this literature review I have examined a broad range of literature which has helped me come to a better understanding of the teacher's *calling* and how it originates and evolves over time. A consistent theme emerging from the literature is that the changing educational landscape has had huge impacts on current teacher discourses, the teaching profession and their perception and experiences of a *call to teach*. The New Zealand early childhood teacher/educator, the focus of this research, is experiencing similar challenges. With this in mind, literature on the changing educational context which has given rise to a corresponding educational discourse both globally and in New Zealand, has been examined to help clarify teachers' current world of practice.

There also appears to be a renewed sense of the word *calling* in relation to the teachers narratives of their vocation in a growing number of personal narratives and evidence captured in research studies. There appears to be a rising *call* for teachers to re-examine their *call to teach*. The origins of teachers' *calling* indicate that a teacher's choice of profession is prompted from inner motivations and external circumstances. From that initial response to teach, literature indicates ebb and flow in a *calling* as it evolves over time. The literature also suggests that the early childhood profession attracts unique altruistic people and some may be prone to burnout. This response might be due to the demands of an increasingly regulated and bureaucratised work environment. However, there are indicators that their motivations for teaching are personal and emotional in

nature and this might contribute to feelings of stress. The literature also implies that there is an ethical, moral, spiritual and emotional dimension to this labour of love. It is envisaged that this research project on teachers' perceptions and experiences of their calling will provide the participants with the opportunity to think about the spiritual nature of teaching.

In the next chapter I will describe the research methodology used in this study.

Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

Inquisitiveness is the creative energy that drives research. It is a desire to search for answers to questions asked (Wisker, 2001). This study attempts to understand why teachers choose teaching as a career; specifically to gain insight regarding the New Zealand early childhood teachers/teacher educators perceptions and experiences of their *call to teach*. For this study, I made a conscious choice to limit my investigation to the early childhood teachers/teacher educators' perceptions and experiences of a *call to teach* as it unfolds over time. With this in mind, early childhood teachers/teacher educators who self-identified as teachers who had heard their *call to teach* and who had a minimum of five years experience were invited to share their stories about their understandings and experiences interacting with the *call*. The primary objective of this research was to appreciate how a *calling* is understood and experienced over time.

This research was designed to address the following question:

What is the nature and experience of the call to teach for New Zealand early childhood teachers and teacher educators?

Qualitative, interpretive approach

This research was underpinned by a qualitative and interpretive approach. How the researcher perceives social realities impacts on how they choose to interpret it (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). I chose this approach to my study because the knowledge I sought was subjective, spiritual and even transcendental. It was based on experience and required insight which is unique and essentially personal in nature (Crotty, 1998). I considered that the examination of a teachers' *calling* required this lens because this phenomenon is viewed and interpreted by creative human beings who are unique individuals and actively construct their social world.

The teacher's teaching world needs to be studied in its natural state because a teacher's teaching life is seen to be fluid, with a *calling* that evolves over time and is richly influenced by context (Chater, 2005; Clandinin et al., 2009; Estola, 2003; Estola et al., 2003). Reality is thus perceived to be multi-layered and complex. As such, there would be multiple interpretations of, and different perspectives given to, teachers' experiences of their *call to teach*. It was also envisaged that there would be thick descriptions in their stories which could only be genuinely understood when examined through the eyes of participants rather than the researcher (Cohen et al., 2000).

Interpretive paradigm

This research was located in an interpretive paradigm as I sought to understand others' perspectives on their *call to teach*. This paradigm is characterised by a concern for the individual (Cohen et al., 2000). I attempted to understand the subjective world of human experience, and in this instance to understand and appreciate the teacher's profession, in terms of their choice of profession and experiences related to that decision. To discover such knowledge required methods that would help unfold the other's perspective, as Cohen et al. (2000, p. 22) puts it, "...get inside the person and ... understand from within." Thus, efforts were made to find methods that had less structure and control by the researcher, and which freed the participants to be empowered to tell their unique and personal stories. I was not seeking to change the participants but rather to deepen my understanding of experiences and perceptions. Thus the choice of an interpretive paradigm, which focused the individual's understandings and interpretations of the world around them, served this research project well.

The interpretive paradigm was also suitable for this research because it has as its roots the belief that theory emerges from the data and that theory should not precede research but follow it (Cohen et al., 2000; Crotty, 1998). Researching such a complex and multifaceted area as a teacher's *calling* required the researcher to enter the discovery journey with an open mind because of the assumption that the choice of profession and the sense that he/she is called to teaching depended on both the person's inner motivations and also external circumstances or context. Thus, knowledge gained was expected to be individual to the particular participant and the researcher needed to work directly with experiences and understandings to draw conclusions and build theory. Thus, the interpretive paradigm has theory as a set of meanings which gives insight and understanding to the way people behave in a certain context (Cohen et al., 2000).

This research is situated in "constructionism" because of the subjective nature of meaning and experiences attached to a teacher's calling and these meanings and experiences can only be co-constructed by the researcher and the participants in a specific context. As the researcher I was interested in reconstructed understandings, trustworthiness and authenticity. I thus looked for ways in which meanings could be made through relationships with my participants (Wisker, 2001). Even while studying a common experience called the teacher's *calling*, it was clear that the teachers construct meaning of this particular phenomena differently (Cohen et al., 2000). Interpretive

researchers attempt to capture this variation through the way participants make sense of their socio-cultural contexts (Borko, Liston & Whitcomb, 2007).

The interpretive paradigm values subjective understandings and ways of knowing. The world is perceived not as an objective reality, rather meanings are co-constructed. I have thus worked directly with the experiences and understandings of the participants so as to jointly build theories on the teacher's *calling*. It is argued by Cohen et al. (2000) that the foundation to this joint discovery journey hinges on the researchers' ability to use themselves as the key to understanding others, and in so doing find out about themselves. As a researcher, I became acutely conscious of the *self* that I bring into the study and have tried my best to listen well and remain tuned to the stories shared by the participants during the interview. I checked my perceptions and understandings for bias through the use of a journal for reflection and contemplation and constructed understanding from the data with an open mind.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research is concerned with seeking insights and trying to understand individuals' perceptions of the world. Qualitative research methods tend to emphasise that reality is socially constructed and that there are situational constraints that shape an inquiry (Bell, 1993; Maynard, 1994; Mutch, 2005). This means in searching for knowledge we need to understand that meaning is not out there to discover, it needs to be constructed by the participants within a specific context (Crotty, 1998). There is an emphasis on people working collaboratively to co-construct meanings within a specific context. Thus, research is considered a meaning-making process (Crotty, 1998).

This qualitative research explores early childhood teachers' experiences of their *call to teach*. Qualitative methodologies are appropriate because the data obtained, that is, the teachers' experiences of the *call to teach*, was expected to be complex and human behaviour, thoughts and feelings can only be understood in real life situations (Gillham, 2000). Understanding a teacher's *calling* involves understanding the meanings, beliefs and experiences of such (Wisker, 2001) by individual teachers who are set in specific contexts within a specific time. The researcher needed to co-construct meanings with the participants to help understand their unique perceptions and experiences with their *call to teach*. Qualitative research rests in grounded theory which is inductive, descriptive, subjective and value-laden (Wellington, 2000). Thus, I went into the research with an open mind aware that data would emerge inductively as I interviewed my participants.

Data from the teachers' stories was expected to open the nature of the interrelationship between a teacher and their *call*. Personal stories are subjective in nature, revealing the individuality of a teacher's awareness of such a *call*, the origins of this *call*, the influence of the *call*, and any possible interrelationship between a teacher's practice and their *call to teach* (Carson, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2000).

Research approach – case study

The case study approach was particularly appropriate because it gives an opportunity for in-depth examination of one aspect of a phenomenon within a limited timeframe (Bell, 1999). Given the focus of this study is an investigation into the early childhood teachers/teacher educators perceptions and experiences of their *call to teach*, the research had been designed as a case study. The case study research approach is often employed to gain first-hand in depth and rich information on a certain social reality (Bouma, 1996; Cohen et al., 2000; Bassey, 1999) with the aim of investigating patterns that emerge to explain the interdependencies of aspects of the phenomena that is studied. Corcoran, Walker and Wals (2004, cited by McGloin, 2008) argue that case study research is a study of practice and the theories that underpin one's action. Investigating a teacher's *call to teach* as it is experienced in the world of practice, provides a critical analysis of individual teacher's practice which will in turn transform both the individual's practice and that of others (Corcoran et al., 2004, cited by McGloin, 2008).

There is evidence that contexts, especially historical and psycho-emotional-social contexts, influence a teacher's choice of profession (Court, et al., 2009). The case study approach, being small and situated, provided me with a three dimensional picture of the teacher's *calling*; the study revealed the relationships, micro issues and patterns of influences on a teacher's *calling* in a specific context (Bell, 1999).

This study provides evidence that although a case study is a specific instance, it can illustrate a more general principle, and the single instance is an example with a 'bounded system' (Cohen et al., 2000). This study was bounded (Bassey, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Sumsion, 2002) by two predominant features. The first was that the participants are early childhood teachers/teacher educators in New Zealand who self-identified as teachers who have experienced a *call to teach*. The second was that they had a minimum of five years work experience. I was well aware that I was working within a limited time frame and heeded Bell's (1999) warning that researchers working to a deadline need to be very careful about the scope of their inquiry.

The unique strength of case studies lies in the attention to the subtlety and complexity of each individual case (Bassey, 1999). I chose this approach because it satisfied two aims: to understand how each teacher (case) perceives and experiences her unique *call to teach*, and to identify common emerging patterns that might provide educators with insights on teachers calling generally. The findings may not be transferable to another setting but significant features may create plausible interpretations of what is found on a teacher's *calling* and may contribute to a theoretical understanding that helps illuminate (Bassey, 2002) other aspects of a teacher's *calling*.

As a case study researcher, I was concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case and strove to capture close-up reality and 'thick description' of participants' lived experiences and thoughts and feelings about their calling. Although I was integrally involved in the case it was important for the teachers' stories of their perceptions and experiences of *the call to teach* be allowed to speak for themselves rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by me (Cohen et al., 2000). I recognised that I was not a detached scientist but was an active participant who needed to acknowledge and reflect on my role in what I had discovered. As such, I conducted my research aware that a research investigation is not neutral; it has its own dynamic and there will be effects both on individuals and organizations (Gillham, 2000).

A case study researcher begins an investigation on a phenomenon with an understanding that it can only be understood in context, so precise boundaries are difficult to draw (Bouma, 1996; Cohen et al., 2000). This approach is particularly useful for my research because I had little control over the phenomena being studied (Cohen et al., 2000) and so needed to keep an open mind to defer analysis until data was completely collected because I was working inductively from what was in the data. Akin to the naturalistic approach, the case study investigated to answer specific research questions - fairly loose at the beginning and relevant literature read may have little bearing upon the 'case' under investigation (Gillham, 2000). I thus conducted this research aware that I could not fully make sense of what was discovered until data was gathered and context understood.

Research techniques

In conducting this case study I recognised that this was an empirical study which meant that the starting point was the collection of data. As the researcher, I went into the data collection phase with the intention of collecting sufficient data so as to: explore

significant aspects of the teacher's calling; interpret data collected in a trustworthy manner; construct a worthwhile argument relating to relevant research in the literature and present the argument based on the findings to an audience so that other researchers may validate, question or provide alternative arguments from the findings (Bassey, 2002).

Interviews

Interviews are defined as “an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 267). They enable the interviewer and participants alike to discuss how they perceive and interpret the world from their point of view (Cohen et al., 2000). Interviews are a method of data collection and generally range from informal conversational interviews, through to semi-structured interviews, to highly structured formal interviews (Cohen et al., 2000; Gillham, 2000). It is valued as indispensable to case study research, and face-to-face interviews especially open up rich opportunities for communication (Gillham, 2000). Bishop (1997) and Gillham (2000) praise the conversational nature of interviews as a form of collaborative storytelling which facilitates meaning making about the participants' lived experiences.

For this specific study, interviews appeared to be the best method of data collection because the questions were mainly open and required full responses with prompts and probes from the researcher to clarify answers (Gillham, 2000). Given that the teacher's stories were critical to the research, data was primarily collected through a one-off, semi-structured interview where the participants recounted experiences behind their *call to teach* and their interrelationship with this *call* over time (Kvale, 1996). This approach provided a natural means to ask questions and allowed the flexibility for both the researcher and participant to probe and clarify as they jointly co-construct. This form of interview has as its forte the ability to be both flexible and standardized at the same time. Every interview is unique and thus as the interviewer I had to be responsive and flexible, yet cover essentially the same ground (Gillham, 2000).

Interview questions

The semi-structured interviews were based on the use of an interviewing guide where a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered were arranged in a particular order. I framed five open-ended questions to pilot my interview questions:

1. How do you describe the nature of your *calling* as a teacher?
2. How do you explain the origin(s) of your *calling*?
3. How have you experienced your *calling* in practice?
4. How have you interacted with your *calling*?
5. How has your *calling* changed over time?

Piloting the questions

I trialled these questions to appraise their suitability for the study. I began with a self-interview. The pilot was meant to uncover my biases and prejudices and to check the viability of the interview questions. On piloting the interview questions, I realised the need to redevelop the interview questions so that they were genuinely open and added prompts and probes to clarify and draw out the interviewees answers (Cohen et al., 2000; Gillham, 2000). An interview guide (see Appendix A) outlining the five research questions with prompts and subsidiary questions was developed. The introductory question allowed the participant time to explain her relationship to early childhood education and served to set the respondent at ease (Cohen et al., 2000).

Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility for me to frame and reframe the questions so that they can be more certain that they are understood in the same way by the participants. One advantage of semi-structured interviews is that the interviewer has the freedom to follow up answers to get more information or to clarify the participant's responses (Best & Kahn, 1993). Semi-structured interviews were seen as appropriate for this study because the open ended questions on such a complex construct as the teachers' perceptions and experiences of their *call to teach* provided opportunities for in-depth responses.

I initially struggled with the need to give up control and free the participants to tell their stories but began to appreciate the power of stories as meaning-making tools, directly representative of human experience (Estola, 2003). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) endorse narrative as the best way of representing and understanding experience. Malm (2004) concurs that life stories provide the opportunity to understand individual teacher's perception of own personal attributes/unique qualities within a wider contextual landscape. Malm's success in capturing the teachers' personal voices in her study on the occupational life histories of Montessori teachers in Sweden, encouraged me to trust the participants' stories. An investigation into this very human experience of a teacher's *calling* invariably led to conversations surrounding what it means to be a

teacher. I became aware of interviews as narrative occasions and to rethink research interviewing as a discursive endeavour (Riessman, 2008). This discursive style is echoed in the traditions of life-history work with teachers (Hansen, 2001) and in spiritual and moral discourses (Palmer, 1999). The semi-structured format of the interview meant we were able to listen to each other, probe further and collaboratively negotiate openings, exploring meanings and shifts in topics (Riessman, 2008). This giving up of control by me as the researcher encouraged greater equality and opened up spaces for the teachers' voices to be heard. This led to genuine discoveries about both the teachers' perceptions and the rich experiences of their *calling*.

Conducting the interviews

Cohen et al.'s (2000) guide on procedures to be adopted at the interview was followed by the researcher. Each participant was given a brief overview of the nature of the interview some days before the interview so as to put them at ease. An explanation and justification for tape recording the interview was made. I also made every effort not to be biased and conducted the interview adhering to the core questions but allowed for flexibility by using prompts and probes where necessary.

The participants were given the option to decide on the place of interview: two chose a lunch time interview at local cafes, three at home, while the last two at their place of work. It is noted that allowing them to self select place of interview provided for rich and naturally occurring conversations which is one of the strengths of interviews (Gillham, 2000).

Each participant was involved in one 45 to 60 minute, face-to-face, semi-structured interview. Although in the Participant Information Sheet, the request was for 30-45 minutes of the participant's time for the interview most of the interviews lasted close to an hour. In trying to understand the participants experiences with their calling as individual stories embedded within the unity of their whole life experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I began to appreciate what it means to use interviews as 'narrative occasions' (Riessmann, 2008, p. 23) where both the interviewer and participant actively co-construct narrative and meaning (Riessmann, 2008). I made every effort to maintain a climate which allows for time and space for conversations to flow naturally so that revealing answers are captured (Gillham, 2000) since the goal of narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts (Riessman, 2008). Thus, the interviews took longer than anticipated but all participants remained engaged throughout the interview and were

generous in the giving of their time. I personally transcribed all the interviews. Interview transcripts were returned to participants for confirmation of their accuracy. The data was then thematically analysed with the advice of my supervisor and a critical friend.

As the researcher, my attention focused on the participants and the experiences they were sharing, however, where necessary, I made informal notes in my journal during the interview. Interview notes were useful, they supplemented recording in terms of non-verbal expressions of the participants and as back-up notes (Bell, 1999; Burns, 2000). By tape-recording the interview I was able to listen to the interview several times to discern possible meanings that had escaped my notice the first time around (Gillham, 2000). In addition, I also kept a research journal throughout the research process to reflect on significant experiences within this research project.

Participants

The research sample consists of seven New Zealand early childhood teachers/teacher educators. Each had a minimum of five years teaching experience, and self-identified as having experienced a *call to teach*. It is designed as a small-scale qualitative research study. This small sample size meant that the project was more manageable, less complicated to set up, considerably less expensive, but was adequate (Cohen, et al., 2000) for exploring the teachers' experiences.

The first participant was identified by my supervisor, and subsequent participants 'snowballed' (Cohen, et al., 2000) from the recommendation of earlier participants. Letters of invitation/Participant Information Sheets (Appendix B) were sent to the seven participants prior to the interview. This letter briefly outlined the research project; the research purpose, the research process, the likely expectations of the participant, and the benefits of participation. Participants had the opportunity to discuss the research with the researcher prior to signing the informed consent (See Appendix C).

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is almost inevitably an interpretation of a social encounter (Cohen et al., 2000). In this research project, a thematic data analysis approach was adopted; this is a commonly used strategy for analysing and reporting qualitative data (Mutch, 2005). This thematic analysis takes its categories from the data. It focuses on identifiable themes and patterns (Aronson, 1994). The broad strategy in a case study approach was to collect data with an open mind so as to gather detailed evidence, the significance of which will only gradually emerge (Gillham, 2000). The analysis of the

data was my primary interest. The data was analysed for features associated with each case, as well as for tentative themes identified across the cases. Informal notes of emergent themes were recorded in my journal for the purpose of later consideration, contemplation and analysis.

Ethical procedures adopted for the study

Cohen et al. (2000) propose that every research project is unique and that while researchers are obliged to meet their moral obligations with respect to those involved in, or affected by, their research, it is acknowledged that the conduct of researchers cannot be forced into a rigid prescribed system of ethics. While this view is taken into consideration, this researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines issued by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee with respect to access to participants, informed consent, confidentiality, mitigating potential risk to participants, participants' right to decline to participate and right to withdraw, participants' right to information, use of information and possible conflicts. These principles were respected throughout the research process. Bassey (1999) three main areas of ethical research, namely: respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect for persons, also guided this research.

Other ethical concerns relevant to the research

When I began my interview I wanted the interview questions to remain the focus of all interactions with the participants. In this way, the participants were not made to feel that their privacy had been invaded or that their time had been improperly used. When I interviewed my first participant I came to realise from her responses that there are aspects of *calling* which relate to the Christian concept of vocation, which in turn elicit a similar Christian response from the participant who is a Christian. I interviewed my participants well aware that I am the primary instrument for gathering and analysing data. Thus, how I respond to a situation will decide how much I maximise opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. I became aware that being human, I am prone to mistakes and personal biases interfere (Merriam, 1998). I also took note in my journal that when my supervisors piloted the interview questions on me, my own Christian lens came through quite strongly in my responses. It was a good learning curve for me as a novice researcher. Thus, to ensure a minimisation of this bias in my interview questions, I added prompts/subsidiary questions which provided the participants the opportunity to examine their choice of profession in their own terms and language. This new direction in interviewing the participants was logged in my journal

for further review and contemplation and it is noted that a richer data came out of this change in strategy while interviewing my participants (Bell, 1999).

I also struggled with the desire to analyse and interpret what my participants were saying while listening to their stories. I learnt to resist this impulse and not let the literature or other data to influence what was being said. Merriam (1998) had reminded me of the need to be comfortable with ambiguity since qualitative research allows the researcher to be flexible and change direction if deemed necessary to pursue meaning. I had to learn how to consciously let the stories speak for themselves and shut out the distractions filtering through from the literature that has been read on the teacher's *calling*. As a beginning researcher I came to realise (through journal reflections) that I had become better at this as I interviewed more participants. Now that the data collection has ended, I have come to understand the appeal of qualitative research in placing the researcher in relatively uncharted waters which then generates a journey of discovery (Merriam, 1998).

Cultural considerations

As an early childhood teacher educator myself, I conducted my research study well aware of the cultural and contextual nature of early childhood education in New Zealand. This includes the accepted cultural protocols within early childhood centres and also our shared understandings of the national early childhood curriculum, Te Whaariki (Ministry of Education, 1996), and our joint aspirations for young children in New Zealand; and all this meant there was a special sense of camaraderie from the invitation to participate to the end of the research process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the method and methodologies that are relevant to this research project. The qualitative and interpretive case study approach was critical to this study in obtaining descriptive accounts of participants' perceptions and experiences with their *calling* to teach. Semi-structured interviews using the narrative inquiry approach proved to be an essential research technique in collecting data for this research project and in allowing the participants to tell their stories. Ethical issues that are relevant for this study have been identified and considered in the light of the research process. The next chapter will discuss the findings of the research project which stem from the thematic data analysis.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

The primary objective of this research was to appreciate how a teacher's *calling* is understood and experienced over time. Thus, this research has been designed to address the following question:

What is the nature and experience of the call to teach for New Zealand early childhood teachers and teacher educators?

Information was gathered from seven in-depth interviews. The objective of the interview was to allow the seven early childhood teachers/teacher educators the opportunity to narrate stories which would help unravel their perceptions of a teacher's *calling* and how it was experienced over time. The data was analysed for distinctive features of each teacher's (case) perceptions and experiences of her *call to teach* and is documented in the first part of this chapter. The second part documents the process of thematic analysis which elicited emergent and recurring themes across the cases that might provide an insight into a teacher's *calling*. Quotes were selected based on richness of content which allowed for a deepening appreciation of this notion of *calling* as it is experienced by the teachers.

Cases

This subsection describes the uniqueness of each participant's perception and experiences with the *call to teach*. Each participant will be introduced briefly before information gathered from the data is presented in narrative form. For this study pseudonyms are used instead of the participant's real names.

Case 1: Elizabeth's story

Elizabeth has been involved in early childhood teaching for the last 10 years. She has worked both in early childhood centres and as a lecturer in a teacher education programme specialising in early childhood teacher education in the Auckland region. She is currently back at an early childhood centre as an area coordinator managing five centres.

Elizabeth's description of her *calling* to teach indicates a conscious recognition that her life is all about her response to a *calling*. She says:

I think my life is about responding to that call because everything I do, recognize that everything I do, every interaction I have with somebody and myself is about learning something about teaching.

She acknowledges that initially it appeared as a random choice of career but around 15 years ago, when she was working with families at an early childhood centre, she realised that every pathway led her back to working with children, either directly, or through her work with families, or within her role as a teacher educator. She says:

I think that my destiny in some ways was set ... Maori believe that your future, much of your future is predisposed and you have to be open to it.

Elizabeth describes her journey in teaching as moving in layers; moving from one layer to another. She identifies the first layer as her being called to enrol in teacher training, followed by her work with children at early childhood centres, then working with families in an early childhood setting, and currently in her work in the tertiary sector within a teacher education programme. She is sensing a shift in 'season', moving back to the focus of the second layer; working with families in a centre. She describes the second season with families as more satisfying than any other season in her teaching career. She feels called back to working with children and families in an early childhood centre context because she is,

wanting to work with children ... that is my calling and everything I have done in the third season has developed my awareness and my ability to work with children but I feel like unless I go back to working with children again I am wasting that

Elizabeth confirms that as she responds to the shifts in her teaching career, she ultimately remains true to the core of her *calling*.

Elizabeth considers her *calling* a gift that has a spiritual dimension to it. She says:

there is a spiritual aspect in that more than my physical being is been nurtured and I am able to nurture that in other people or I try to.

As she reflects on her response to her *calling*, she describes it as being perfect, saying:

It has done everything that I wanted it to do. It is my career but more than that it has satisfied everything I need in my working life. And so that's why I believe it is a calling – because it came to me, it was a gift.

Elizabeth also describes her *calling* as a higher *calling* of serving her people. She explains:

teaching is my place in a Maori world, that I will lead my people through teaching ... for a small group of people that will have interaction with me at some stage in life that's my role to lead them from a dark place into the light, I hope.

This *call* to serve her people is perceived to be predestined. She talks passionately about children who are lost, who somehow do not fit. She finds herself moving towards such

children so as to enrich their lives in some ways. She adds that making a difference in the lives of people motivates her.

Case 2: Samantha's story

Samantha is a Montessori early childhood educator who started her teaching career in India as a volunteer teacher, motivated by a desire to do something beneficial for others. She completed a Montessori course in India and then immigrated to New Zealand where she has been teaching at a Montessori early childhood centre.

Right from the onset, Samantha was insistent that:

We are teachers but we are not called to teach. We are here to support someone and if we are going to support someone, you need to know what is there in the person.

This knowledge of the “unique nature of the child” might be seen when the teacher and child look at each other and the message is conveyed by the child that, “I know that you know who I am”. She explains that teaching has to do with the teacher’s understanding of “the child’s true nature of learning” and working in a symbiotic manner with the child. She described her first interaction with her *calling* as “a spark of light”, when a child opened himself up to the learning experience and she looked “into the mind of this child”, and helped “unfold the child”.

Samantha considers her *calling* involved phases and shifts. She saw it as dynamic, and needing to be kept alive:

a teacher's call is something that is important, it should always remain immortal ...it has to be at that stage of where to next?

She uses the metaphor of a ladder where one climbs one step at a time; the *calling* inspiring her to the next step. As she moves from one phase to another, she asks herself, “What is the *call* now?” She believes the *calling*, the opportunities and challenges that come her way; all help shape, define and give clarity to her *call to teach* and the direction it should take.

Samantha suggests that the need for support gives meaning to one’s *calling*. She talks about her belief that:

no matter how professionally well advanced we are, there is always a need for a mentor and a support for someone to refine your call – the call is yours, the beliefs are yours but it has no meaning without a mentor.

She explains that the mentor is needed to help the teacher make meaningful connections between one's belief and one's practice, and in so doing, unfold one's potential.

Samantha considers teaching to be a noble profession. Indeed, she felt drawn to teaching out of a desire to do some charity work. She now sees it differently. She looks back on her student days where perceptions of teaching as a noble profession were tied to the notion of a teacher as a dispenser of knowledge, helping others gain knowledge. She reflected on this and come to the conclusion that:

From where I am now I do not see myself now as helping someone gain knowledge because I know that the person himself/herself, that little child there, is already a competent learner. He just knows that is his/her direction, and it is me who is just being, having an honour to participate.

Case 3: Daisy's story

Daisy is an early childhood teacher educator teaching in an early childhood education teacher education programme at an Auckland university. She began her career in primary teaching and then moved on to early childhood education in the 1990's teaching in a Christian kindergarten. It was at this kindergarten that she decided to retrain as an early childhood teacher.

When reflecting on the origins of her *calling*, she says that the use of the word "*calling*", implies:

that you are hearing a voice, that somebody is asking you, beckoning you.

She identifies teachers as her primary influence in responding to the *call to teach*. She talked about teachers being the primary influence, but singled out the catholic nuns who encouraged her to pursuit her dreams by encouraging her:

You must reach the pinnacle of your calling – you must follow your calling.

However, in immersing herself in her thoughts, she also included her family, her mother who was a teacher, and also the aspirations of her family that she realise a dream in education.

When she looks at her *calling* in practice, she is clear that what drives her work is a desire to bring about change, to advocate for social justice and equity, and to be of service to her community. She talks about the need for teachers to be aware of changes in the contexts and world around them:

I am teaching for a world that I do not know about – so my students are going to be living in a world that doesn't necessarily equate to a world that I know.

She wants to pass on to the next generation of early childhood practitioners essential knowledge, attitudes, values and skills, which are intrinsic in nature and include “kindness, patience, respect for others, charity, joy, peace, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

In describing her interactions with her *calling*, Daisy likens it to cycles, seasons, or phases. She is able to identify clear phases. For example, her time spent at boarding school with the catholic nuns, her teaching days at the kindergarten, and now her tertiary teaching season, is described as her “twilight days of teaching.” She likens her teaching career to life:

Teaching is synonymous with life and therefore life changes as we do. As teachers, ... they grow with people ... we are growing alongside ... change as well. So I think there are definite huge changes in my calling as a teacher.

Case 4: Thelma's story

Thelma is the licensee and centre manager of a preschool. She began her training and subsequent career in early childhood in South Africa and upgraded her qualifications and continued her career in New Zealand. She is inspired by the Reggio Emilia teaching philosophy.

Thelma's passion for working with young children began when she was still a young child. As she recollected the origins of her *calling*, she reiterates numerous times when she knew her place was working with children. She explained that this “initial knowing that I wanted to work with children was there from a very young age.” However, she confirms that this intrinsic motivation was reinforced by the circumstances in her life, which included her sister's common interest in being a teacher, her husband's parallel love for working with children, her decision to migrate, and opportunities and circumstances that arose in New Zealand which allowed her to grow in her understanding of her *call to teach*.

She sees her *calling* as moving from one ‘space’ to another. She describes how her *calling* to teach young children have changed in shape and focus out of the experiences gained from one metaphorical space to another. It began with her original training and early childhood teaching career in South Africa where the focus of teaching was more

on producing “good outcomes”, which she now calls a “dangerous space”, because she felt so good at what she did that she did not feel challenged anymore. However, she recognised that this provided her with the motivation to move to New Zealand where:

a whole new chapter opened and a whole new way of life and new way of thinking started for me.

While in New Zealand, other ‘spaces’ arose where she moved from her role as centre supervisor to owning a centre with her husband where she became increasingly aware that she was moving out of her role as a teacher to that of a leader. Within this current space, she sees herself now as:

supporting other people and I think that is very lacking in the world at the moment and that’s where I see my role – it’s just that support.

Thelma sees her *calling* as deeply enmeshed with her Christian beliefs and her innate desire to serve others. This began early on in South Africa where she did voluntary work alongside her husband at Nazareth House, “a home for children who were abandoned by their parents.” She describes the core of her *calling* as her love for working with children and

just knowing that you have it within your hands to be able to offer these children something that may change their lives.

She spoke with conviction about the importance of mentors in helping to clarify her *calling*.

Each and every person in early childhood must have a mentor of some kind ... somebody who can always push that button a little bit.

She spoke at length and with much respect for one of her mentors who not only became a good friend but had helped her grow in her understanding of how her own philosophy resonates with that of Reggio Emilia. These mentors helped her make sense of her *calling* when it got tough, moments when she felt like she was:

*... in that bucket full of water [and] you can’t get your head on top of it
... you are just sort of sitting here under your eyes.*

It is then that the mentors helped her nurture the ‘seeds’ that were already there in the first place.

There is a sense that her *calling* has evolved over time. She has stayed true to her core passion for young children yet her ideals about teaching young children has shifted from “doing a good deed” at Nazareth House in South Africa to recognizing that being a teacher involves the ability to listen and to teach from who you are, “whereas now I see it much more as this is who I am.” She talks about the role of maturity; circumstances

and people who have come her way, that have helped her fine-tune her *calling*. However, she consistently insists that her belief is her *calling* comes from:

a being beyond ourselves that has put that initial passion into you and puts the right people in your pathway to nurture that all the time.

Case 5: Judith's story

Judith is an early childhood educator teaching in an early childhood teacher education programme.

When asked about the origins of her *call to teach*, she was able to recollect vividly that it goes way back to her childhood days where she “always wanted to be a teacher”. This conviction carries right through to adult life. She talked about how a desire to be a teacher was confirmed when she was a mum and saw others training to be early childhood teachers. It reminded her that:

actually this is what I like to do and the sense came back. I mean it has always been there.

When she thinks further about her *calling*, she realises that her *call* has to do with her being maternal in nature and the fact that her life has revolved around children anyway. She talks about:

that desire to nurture and support, and be involved in children's lives, my own and others.

The memories made her realise that it is hard to single out a point or moment in time when her love for teaching young children began. She sees the *call* as coming from within and that “it has always been part of me (her).”

Her motivation to teach young children comes out of a desire to:

Rescue ... these poor children that might be from disadvantaged families ... and to make a difference in children's lives.

She also sees her *calling* as manifesting in two ways; one as supporting families so that it creates better outcomes for children and also supporting women which results in empowering children.

As Judith recounts her teaching journey, she talks about mentors who have supported and helped shape her *call to teach*. She described in detail the influence played by one such mentor. The role of the mentor is described as follows:

She gave me lots of time, talked to me, listened to my ideas, not just listened to them but she valued them and when we feel valued that made a huge difference – it made me feel I had something to contribute.

It grew into a reciprocal relationship. She talked about this centre manager who had believed in her and was “instrumental in my growing a lot from being a teacher to being a leader”.

Judith also believes that she has stayed true to the core of her *calling*, and that is working for the betterment of children. It was while working with children at early childhood centres that her leadership qualities were recognized, and this then motivated her to move on to tertiary teaching, where she is an early childhood teacher educator. She talks about her desire to be back in an early childhood centre:

I don't need to own a centre or manage a centre in that sense but to be involved like in a community centre where the philosophy fitted ... with my beliefs.

The motivation to go back where she started is expressed as:

I see a strong sense of calling to provide quality for them (children at the centre) and for their parents --- there are not many good centres out there – (it) tugs at my heart string when I see children being disrespected

This echoes her insistence that the core of her *calling* is working with young children and their families in an early childhood centre context. There is a sense that she has the determination to return to the core of her *calling*.

Case 6: Kelly's story

Kelly is a centre manager of an early childhood centre and works part-time for a tertiary provider on their early childhood teacher education programme.

Kelly only recognized her *call to teach* when she was teaching at an early childhood centre which embraced the teachers as one of their own. This feeling of acceptance from the community made her realize she was enjoying what she was doing:

Guess we were their children's teachers and inside their head, there is a kind of standing in the community. It wasn't until then, I guess, that whole acceptance, that I started to enjoy what I was doing.

She describes working with families as the ‘icing to the cake’ because these relationships enrich her work with the children. She likens the relationship with families to “adding sugar. You know like you can make something but you add that sugar and it tastes better or you add salt and it tastes better.” She further clarifies this metaphor as families providing the depth and closeness that is needed to enrich the teaching experience with children.

Kelly talks about mentors that have helped shape her *calling* and this includes her mother and a very close friend. She affectionately calls this friend her “conjoint twin”, the colleague and friend who started training with her to be an early childhood teacher and to this day,

always discussing issues, talking about what happened, reflecting and challenging.

This helps her understand her *calling* better.

Kelly has been working in one centre throughout her teaching career. She has done this by choice:

I have purposefully only worked in South Auckland. I have chosen not to work outside of that area. I have always worked in centres where there has been a minority of Europeans.

She feels called to teach in this specific community because she believes “Maori and Pasifika children need good role models.” She explains that she has been able to remain true to the *call* to serve in this community because of the empathetic support given by her director and the satisfaction she gets from the “joys of children discovering new or sharing things” with her.

She talks passionately about the core of her *calling* and that is, working with the children. This special interest in children keeps her in the profession and though she is now a manager she intentionally spends as much time as she can “out on the floor with the kids.” However, she now senses a shift in her *calling* as she models what it means to be a good teacher with her teaching team and the student teachers who come to her centre for teaching practice. She also sees herself moving into a new season where her role as helping the early childhood community by helping student teachers “unlock” their passion for teaching lies within.

Case 7: Susan’s story

Susan is currently the supervisor of a kindergarten and had been an early childhood teacher overseas before continuing her career in early childhood in New Zealand. She began her career in the field of law but soon recognized that it was not the profession for her,

In my heart I knew I was in the wrong place ... I really want to be a teacher.

With that conviction she applied for a place in a teachers college and worked part-time as a teacher in a preschool overseas.

Susan recognises the role played by people and the influence of circumstances on her response to a *call to teach*. She talked about the three career paths she contemplated upon completion of her formal schooling - air hostess, lawyer, teacher. Her first choice, working in a legal firm, brought her a measure of unease. However, what was more significant to her was a remark made by the senior partner in the law firm:

You missed your vocation in life and you should have been a teacher.

This prompted her to relook at what she perceives to be her purpose in life. Other circumstances occurred, such as being offered a place in a teachers' training college, being offered cross-credits from her original law degree, and getting a job at a preschool. These circumstances all seemed to indicate to her that this is the logical career path for her.

While Susan does logically unpack her *call to teach*, she also consistently talks about a sense of 'knowing' when one is in the right profession and describes teaching as:

This is what I wanted to do. This is what I always wanted to do.

She reminisces about teaching her own children and how at that point she recognized,

And I think from then onwards I knew.

She is adamant that her motivation to teach comes from within:

... for me it definitely comes from within. Definitely, from within. When you teach, you got to teach from the heart.

She cites love as the primary motivation for remaining in this career:

I love what I do. I love the centre, I love the children.

When describing her interactions with her *calling*, she suggests that the core of her *calling* is with children but she says:

I can see that my calling is going to grow, and grow and continue to grow not just with the children I am working with.

She sees herself now growing towards working with children with special needs and that the pull in this direction appears to come from the children:

Special needs children seem to find me because these children know more about what's inside me than I do.

She links her *calling* to the desire to help special needs children and is convinced she will make a difference. She speaks with passion and frustration about the long wait to obtain help and sees the injustice done:

Why should such children be left behind waiting and waiting and waiting for? ... I referred a child in October last year for assessment. I am still waiting. I am still waiting.

She embraces the work with these special children as part of her growth as a teacher.

I am wanting to grow. I am wanting a challenge.

She appears to make a connection between growth and challenges in keeping that passion for teaching alive.

Emerging Themes

This subsection describes the emergent themes that arose for me as researcher from the seven stories. These themes reflect various aspects of the nature and experience of a teacher's *calling*. They relate to the origins of the *calling*: both internal and external; *calling* recognised as a means to support and advocate for children, families, community and humanity; *calling* perceived as hopeful: inspiring, satisfying and intrinsically motivated; *calling* experienced as patterns and metaphors; and *calling* sustained through relationships with critical friends/mentors. Quotations from the participants which appear to best capture each theme are presented for illustration and illumination. While the themes are separated for their presentation, the themes are lived experientially in an interwoven manner.

Origins of the calling – internal and external

The origins of individuals *calling* are unique in terms of the internal or external promptings.

Internal Promptings

Judith struggled to pinpoint the exact time when she recognized the origins of her *calling* to teach because she felt that the desire to teach young children has always resided within her:

I guess right from when I was a child. Well, as far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a teacher. So, I guess it has always been there. ... I guess there's always been passion ... it's just been part of who I am ... I can't actually say when because it has always been part of me. (Judith)

Sometimes, being in the wrong 'place' opens clarity of one's inner *calling*. Susan says:

I thought, "..., I really don't want to be here anymore. I don't want to spend the rest of my life causing other people's misery. I really want to be a teacher. ... it definitely comes from within. (Susan)

External promptings

For some participants, external promptings serve to reinforce initial internal prompting:

For myself ... it is something I always wanted to do. I remember that from a very, very young age. The things that happened in my life just kept on reinforcing that. ... if my upbringing at home had been different or I hadn't met somebody like Bert who was also very fond of children, then it may have taken a different direction but all these people in my life kept reinforcing that feeling that yes this is what I want to do. (Thelma)

Similarly, other people can provoke ones thinking about *calling* as Susan found.

I worked for the senior partner of the law firm and he said to me, "You missed your vocation in life and you should have been a teacher." He kept saying this to me and I am thinking. (Susan)

This next participant, Daisy explains the strong influence played by the nuns in her Catholic schooling:

The origin of my calling would have been deeply rooted in my own family... as ... my mother was, although she was untrained, working part-time in a ... kindergarten. And then ... significant people were saying hold on to your dreams, hold on to your aspiration, just hold on to those goals in life ... and make them a reality. (Daisy)

When talking about the origins of her *calling*, Elizabeth sees it as her response to an invitation. She says:

I see it as a journey that I don't choose, it has been chosen for me. ... It is responding to a call from somewhere else. (Elizabeth)

In acknowledging the role played by both circumstances and people in her life, Thelma emphasises the role played by God in instilling her initial desire to teach, along with the provision of people to support the teaching journey:

I think ... it is a Being beyond ourselves that ... - puts that initial passion into you and puts the right people in your pathway to nurture that all the time. (Thelma)

These stories suggest that both inner and external promptings shape the origin of a teacher's *calling*.

Called to support and advocate

Supporting others, especially the marginalised, appears to frame, the core motivation to teach. The stories of the participants include a political expression of advocacy and social justice for others. These intentions appear to be aimed at bringing about positive outcomes for children, the community and humanity in general.

For some, the notion of *calling* is closely linked to helping others. Two participants recognised that they were drawn to helping children:

The ... longer I am in early childhood ..., the more my passion, ..., was going towards those children who are struggling ... I took to teaching voluntarily just to help, ... this experience of a teacher's call happened ... when I was supporting these children who were a challenge to others ... (Samantha)

This desire to work with less fortunate children is expressed by Judith. Part of the teaching role involves advocating for children and the wider role of promoting social justice. She says:

I guess to start with there was the bit on rescuing children. ... I wanted to make a difference in children's lives... And now I am at the point in my life that ... I can stand up and advocate for children which I couldn't back then. (Judith)

The next participant, Samantha, recognizes how her *calling* focuses more on making a difference in their lives:

But I can see that my passion is changing, not completely away from children that are without struggle but my passion is changing to see what I can do to make a difference to those children who are struggling. (Samantha)

Calling as supporting and empowering

The support by participants expands beyond children. They recognise the need for them to help and empower their colleagues and other adults they come into contact with.

Elizabeth sees her *calling* as a means of empowering families she works with. She says:

I was part of developing [mother's] interest and ... self confidence, their belief that they can do it. I think I have lost count of the number of parents whom I have been involved in who have gone on to become teachers and also gone on to become something else other than mothers, and follow their dreams, I guess. (Elizabeth)

Judith sees her *calling* as advocating for children and women:

It is heart rendering when you go to a centre especially when you see practices that's not good. You so want to go in and make it different for the children, make it better I guess it's wanting for children to have the best possible start.

Calling as a means of caring

Participants added another dimension to supporting others when they shared their hopes and aspirations for the community at large. Thelma talked about the importance of *calling* as caring:

We had opportunities to help people – ... and we both believe that there's a way of giving that back to the community. (Thelma)

Daisy also sees her role for future generations.

... there is a heightened awareness now that again in my twilight years of teaching, [that] ... my students are going to be living in a world that doesn't necessarily equate to a world I know. So, fundamentally, what are the key crux matters – attitudes and skills that I want to pass on to them. So, that's becoming more to the forefront of my thinking now. (Daisy)

It is evident that participants perceive their *calling* as a means to help, support, advocate and empower children, families and the community they work with.

Calling as being hope-full: inspiring, satisfying

Elizabeth sees her *calling* as a source of *creativity* which nurtures her and the children she works with.

It's creative ... important to me within that creativity there is a spiritual aspect in that more than my physical being is been nurtured and I am able to nurture that in other people. (Elizabeth)

Intrinsic satisfaction nurtures and inspires Samantha to reach for high ideals in teaching:

At that moment it was not an urge to teach ... but I really did want to give my time to doing something beneficial and when this opportunity came up and I thought maybe I can just go help around when someone needs help and support someone. (Samantha)

Similarly, Elizabeth suggests:

It has done everything that I wanted it to do. It is my career but more than that it has satisfied everything I need in my working life. And so that's why I believe it is a calling – because it came to me, it was a gift. (Elizabeth)

For Daisy, her *calling* is experienced as stimulating and invigorating:

So it still stimulates me as a person, it still stimulates my goals which is to gain equity, social justice, freedom of thought and freedom of expression. ... I think there is still something that I still have to offer. (Daisy)

Susan concurs, stating that what keeps her going to work is that she loves every minute of being there.

You know when you wake up in the morning and get out of bed ... it's a good thing. ... And it is that desire to be around young children that makes you want to come to work. For me, it is not a job, it is not a job at all. ... It is a complete desire from within. I love every minute that I am here. You think about what you are going to do tomorrow when I go home. ... I love it, I love it. It is my passion. What gets me up in the morning. (Susan)

It becomes apparent that a teacher's call appears to engender hopefulness.

Calling experienced as patterns and metaphors

When asked to describe their interactions with their *calling* over time, participants use metaphors to capture their teaching journey. Samantha uses a metaphor of a “*ladder*” to describe the evolution of her teaching career:

It is something in you ... it evolves - it has its ups and downs.... In this process of evolving ... I always come up to phases ..., I understood something and I was back at the same end of the ladder. (Samantha)

Another participant sees teaching as synonymous with life itself, moving in cycles like “*seasons*”. Daisy writes:

We go through seasons. I am definitely in a later season now and ... am beginning to understand as I progress in my teaching, that learning and teaching are synonymous with life and therefore life changes as we do as teachers as they grow ... we are with growing alongside change as well. (Daisy)

This perception of growth is echoed by Samantha:

So I think as a teacher you never, you should never, stop growing. You should always continue to seek and find new ways of teaching and new ways of helping every child, not just the children that are really easy at learning. (Susan)

Yet another metaphor used is “*space*”. When describing her initial teaching experiences. Thelma talks about the phase where she was overly confident in her teaching and described it as a *dangerous space*:

For me that was a very dangerous space to be in at that stage because you know when you get to a point where you feel so good about yourself, you don't actually feel challenged anymore because you think you have reached ... the end goal. (Thelma)

Teachers can perceive their *calling* as moving in distinct patterns with corresponding shifts, and new ways of thinking and doing. There appears to be awareness that teaching involves the ability to recognise phases and be open to changes which leads to new ways of thinking and doing.

Participants showed an understanding that there are ebbs and flow in their *calling*. Elizabeth highlights the cyclical nature of her *calling*. She recognises that the core of her *calling* remains even when the focus changes:

It is a different call but it is still about teaching but I am called to do something else but it is always about teaching. (Elizabeth)

As she reminisces on her life as a teacher, she realises that it began with the children at the early childhood centre, but there was a shift in the journey when she felt called to

working with families, then to a tertiary environment and now she senses a call back to the community again. She has gone full circle but there is a narrowing down on the focus of her *calling*:

I am going to continue to teach. ... – my teaching will be even more narrow – so that I am working mainly with Maori – young people as in teenagers and parents, adults because I believe our future is in the young adults, young people. (Elizabeth)

Kelly too is sure that she will remain true to the core of her *calling* to work within a certain community in a specific early childhood centre:

Yeah I tell people I am going out in the box and am going to die there and have my funeral there and get carried out in a box. I don't see myself being in any other centre. (Kelly)

These stories suggest that while the focus of the teachers work may grow and change, they have a tendency to return with the original sphere of their vocation.

Calling sustained through relationships with critical friends and mentors

The participants cited the important role played by critical friends and mentors in clarifying, provoking and sustaining their *call to teach*. This person helps to form meaningful connections between our ideas and *calling*:

I realize the mentor that you have helps you in unfolding your potential at a certain pace you know. It's not open – it's not wide open - there's a pace and the mentor helps you link effectively to your practice – ... the connection and the mentor is there to help enrich the connection. (Samantha)

Similarly, Judith describes a mentor who modelled a way of being that helped her clarify her *calling*:

She was instrumental in my growing a lot from being a teacher to being a ... support for other teachers. So it was her influence, she influenced me a lot actually and her leadership style, believing in me, having you know, ... giving me the space and the time ... who saw strengths in people and it wasn't just in me but also with others ... She gave me lots of time, talked to me, listened, tried to listen to my ideas and not just listen to them but she valued them ... made me feel like I had something to contribute. (Judith)

Critical friends can come in the form of colleagues who provoke and challenge our *calling*:

I think it is through that collegiality. That helps me enormously – the conversations we are able to have ... when my opinions are challenged by others. I think that's very, very much a stimulating, part of keeping my work alive. ... I can really support other people who are now maybe in that same space that I was ... because sometimes people just need, ... to

verbalise their problems and while they are verbalising, they are solving it. (Thelma)

A critical friend and mentor can serve to enrich the teacher's teaching life by helping the teacher to recognize and help shape a *calling* and support the teacher through the ups and downs of the teaching journey.

Summary

In seeking to discover the nature and experience of the New Zealand early childhood teacher's *calling* to teach, this chapter has outlined the uniqueness of participants' stories and traced five emergent themes across the data. These themes seek to capture the participants' understandings of their *call to teach* and how this *call* is experienced over time. The themes can be listed as:

- *Calling* understood as crossroads of internal and external promptings
- *Calling* recognized as a means to support, advocate, empower and care
- *Calling* experienced as being hope-full
- *Calling* experienced as patterns and metaphors
- *Calling* sustained through relationships with critical friends/mentors

In the next chapter, the essential aspects of the emerging themes are discussed in more detail in the light of the existing literature.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of the New Zealand early childhood teachers'/teacher educators *call to teach*. It was focused on New Zealand early childhood teachers and teacher educators who self-identified as having a *calling* to teach and a minimum of five years experience. I have identified a growing body of literature on a teacher's *call to teach* (Cammock, 2009; Buskit et al., 2005; Casbon et al., 2005; Hansen, 1995; 2001; Joldersma, 2006; Mayes, 2005; Palmer, 1998; Sykes, 2003) which indicates a revival of a language from the past where teachers use vocation and *calling* to describe their work. However, many of these studies were not situated in a New Zealand education context or specific to the New Zealand early childhood arena. While an increasing number of studies have focussed on teachers' choice of profession, they appear to draw more interest internationally, for example: United Kingdom (Chater, 2005), Australia (Game & Metcalfe, 2008; Fenech et al., 2009), United States (Casbon et al., 2005; Hansen, 1995; Marshall, 2009), Canada (Clandinin et al., 2009), Finland (Estola, 2003; Estola et al., 2003) and Israel (Court et al., 2009). There has been and still is a lack of literature in New Zealand focussing on teachers' reasons for joining the profession, and, in particular, early childhood teachers/teacher educators.

This study was designed to help address this gap in literature and contribute to the conversations about teachers' choice of profession and on how teachers perceive their work as a vocation and a *calling*. I endeavoured to provide some insights on New Zealand early childhood teachers/teacher educators' perceptions and experiences of their *call to teach* as captured in the stories early childhood teachers/teacher educators told me about their choice of profession and the work that they do.

A reconnaissance of the literature indicated that the teacher's choice of profession was prompted by inner motivations and external circumstances, there was ebb and flow in the *calling* as it was experienced over time; and that a teacher's *calling* had a beginning alongside an experiential sense of ownership and understanding (Sykes, 2003). The profession appears to attract altruistic people who are drawn to teaching for personal reasons, where teachers perceive their job as having an ethical, moral, spiritual and emotional dimension. The rising call for teachers to re-examine their *call to teach* could possibly be part of a larger wave seeking reforms in education. This study aimed to

appreciate the way that some early childhood teachers in New Zealand perceived and experienced their *call to teach*.

Perceptions of the calling: Calling as a lived experience

Discourse on *calling* grapples with the elusive nature of a teacher's *calling*. Hansen (1995) and Palmer (2000) suggest that an understanding of the teacher's *call to teach* needs to be cognisant that it is a lived experience, not a static theoretical concept and is continuously evolving. The *calling* is perceived to be multifaceted and closely linked to practice (Buskit et al., 2005; Hansen, 1995; Mayes, 2002). The participants in this study talked about the emotional, moral, ethical and spiritual dimensions to the *calling* and consistently gave examples from practice to illustrate their perceptions of the *call to teach*.

Calling experienced as being hope-full and satisfying

My participants perceived their *calling* as a source of intrinsic motivation. It appeared to bring satisfaction, joy and creativity. These stimulated and invigorated the teacher's sense of vocation. Seen in this light, teaching was experienced as intrinsically satisfying and nurtured both the teacher and the children/people they came in contact with. Elizabeth described it as being creative in that "there is a spiritual aspect, in that, more than my physical being is being nurtured and I am able to nurture that in other people." It also appeared to inspire the teachers to reach for higher ideals. Samantha talked about giving her time "to doing something beneficial...I thought maybe I can just go help around when someone needs help and support someone." Daisy talked about how it stimulated her goals "to gain equity, social justice, freedom of thought and freedom of expression ...". A number of the participants talked about how teaching was satisfying and that brought much joy, love and passion to the job:

It has done everything that I wanted it to do. It is my career but more than that it has satisfied everything I need in my working life" (Elizabeth).

I think there is definitely an enjoyment, an enjoyment there that continues my love and my desire to stay in that calling ..." (Daisy).

For me it is not a job, it is not a job at all ... It is a complete desire from within. I love every minute that I am here ... I love it! I love it! It is my passion. What gets me up in the morning (Susan).

It became apparent that a teacher's *call* seemed to engender a sense of hopefulness. The emotional nature of a teacher's *calling* was captured in Estola et al. (2003) study. Her findings concurred on the personal dimension in teaching. The teachers in my study also

described the joys of teaching but acknowledged that it also brought along with it both expected highs and lows of the profession, followed by corresponding feelings of elation and disappointments. However, when these teachers spoke of being *called to teach*, they spoke with energy, enthusiasm and passion of their love for teaching. These findings suggest that teaching brings along with it much pleasure and joy. This appears to override the trial and tribulations of teaching and may be the key to keeping teachers in the profession.

The findings from this study appear to run contrary to the growing body of literature which suggests that all is not necessarily well with the teachers' world. It is quite clear from research studies and literature examined that there are increasing threats to teachers' well-being both in New Zealand and globally. Overall, teachers reported high levels of stress and a lack of well-being (Harker, Gibbs, Ryan, Weir & Adams, cited by Gibbs 2002). Many teachers felt ill-prepared for the job, are suffering from burnout and disillusionment and consequently are leaving the profession (Fenech et al., 2009; Harker, Gibbs, Ryan, Weir & Adams, cited by Gibbs, 2002; Korthagen 2004). There is a rising trend in teachers leaving only after a few years of teaching due to shifting societal changes and pressures from increasing standardised accountability in education (Clandinin et al., 2009). Elsewhere early childhood teaching is perceived as a 'marginalised profession' with lower wages and poorer working conditions and this has resulted in staff turnover and dissatisfaction (Fenech et al., 2009). The findings of this study suggest the contrary. There is evidence that these early childhood teachers are motivated by intrinsic benefits from teaching young children and are prepared to stay in the profession even when educational environments appear challenging. This finding will be of interest to educationalists working towards increasing teacher retention amidst shifting educational landscapes.

Called to care, support and advocate

This study suggests that supporting others, especially the marginalised, appears to frame the core motivation to teach. The ethical and moral dimensions of a *calling* manifest themselves in the participants' political expression of advocacy and social justice for others. They expressed their aim of making that difference and bringing about positive outcomes for children, the community and humanity in general.

Some participants talked about feeling called to care, support and advocate for children. Susan talked about how she felt drawn to special needs children "who are struggling,

struggling” and “who seem to find me”. She expressed her desire to “facilitate their learning so that they can bridge the gap of their struggling between where they are now until when they go to school.” This similar desire to work with the less fortunate is echoed by other participants. Thelma talked about the origins of her *calling* and concluded her “volunteer work at a home for abandoned children” was a big influence in her *call to teach*. Samantha also took to teaching as a volunteer “to help ...like charity work ... to support these children who were a challenge to others and the way they were taught meant they could get nowhere.” This need to advocate for children who were perceived to be marginalised was again expressed by Judith who acknowledged that she began her career in teaching with the notion of “rescuing children” and wanting to “make a difference in children’s lives ...but there’s also a little bit of rescuing these poor children that might be from disadvantaged families.”

Thelma echoed this wish to make a difference in children’s lives, “It is the love to work with children really and to ... just knowing that you have it within your hands to be able to offer these children something that may change their lives.” A similar desire is expressed by Judith when she talks about centres that don’t show good practice, “You so want to go in and make a difference for the children; make it better, to make a difference. I guess it’s wanting for children to have the best possible start.”

This notion of advocacy and support is echoed in Elizabeth’s conscious choice to work with children who are considered lost and difficult:

... children who in a sense have been lost: the difficult ... who no other teacher likes, often other children don’t like the child for many reasons sometimes special needs children who might not fit in and I am able to work with those children and enrich their lives in some way...

The overseas literature confirmed my finding on the ethical and moral dimension to the teacher’s *calling*. Estola et al.’s (2003) study confirmed that a teacher’s vocation is perceived as a moral voice and this is translated into a form of caring profession (Estola et al., 2003). Mayes (2002; 2005) describes his image of the teacher as that of an archetype of spirit. The early childhood teachers in this study reflected Mayes (2002) conclusion that all major archetypes of the spirit to teach are rooted in “care”. He referred to Tillich’s (1959; cited by Mayes, 2002) description of such teachers as ‘mentors’ with an ‘ultimate concern’ about those who look to them for guidance and insight. He also claimed that Mathews (1988, cited by Mayes, 2002) also endorsed this viewpoint when he claimed that many teachers who are considered great, show this

ontological care for their students. I agree with Mayes (2002) observation that great teachers typically care a great deal about their students, and the teachers interviewed in this study obviously fall under this category. This might explain why they make that difference in their profession.

This notion of ethical responsibility has been addressed extensively by Mayes (2005) who offers an alternative view of the ethical teacher. Mayes (2005) refers to such teachers as spiritually-called teachers who are willing to face their own suffering and pain, to restore themselves so that they may help others do the same. Hansen (1994) points out that there is a religious undertone to this perception of vocation because such an interpretation requires a disregard of one's own needs and self-sacrifice. This ability to form the empathetic connection between teacher and learner (Palmer, 2004; 1998; 1997) results in a caring teaching posture and a 'caring' attitude in his/her *calling*. The teachers in my research spoke extensively about how they care for the children and this foundational belief that teaching is a caring profession and includes the ethics of relationship is supported by literature (Ayers, 2001; Elbaz, 1992; Gibbs, 2006; Giles, 2007; 2008; Giles & Alderson, 2008; Giles & Kung, 2010; Noddings, 2001; Palmer, 2004; 2000; 1998; Shelby, 2003; Snook, 2003). A word of caution comes from Snook (2003), who while agreeing that education is situated in care and respectful relationships, points out that it is the moral responsibility of the teacher to respect the learner's right to autonomy and respect the person's ability to think and reason for oneself.

This is especially critical since literature also showed that teachers made clear connections between the reasons for choosing the profession and the teachers' perceptions of the essence of the role (Court et al., 2009). The teachers in my research chose early childhood teaching because of a desire to "educate, nurture and foster", and because of their love for children. They perceived teaching as the most suitable job to fulfil this desire since they perceived the essence of teaching being to "nurture, foster and be concerned" for the children under their care. This attitude to serve the children concurs with Estola et al.'s (2003) study which confirmed the teachers' sense of their ethical responsibility and 'duty to serve', which in turn translated into a moral responsibility to defend children in their practice (Estola et al., 2003).

This study concurred with the literature I examined which indicated that almost all who view teaching as a *calling* derive abundant rewards from the activities associated with it.

Most of these rewards involve the effects that the teachers' teaching have on their students (Estola et al., 2003). Some of this literature (Buskist et al., 2005; Palmer, 1998, Casbon et al., 2005; Intrator & Scribner, 2003) confirmed the effects of learners' responses to teachers' emotional well-being. For these teachers, recognising that they are making a positive difference in their students' lives affirms their belief that they are called to teach. Of significance is my finding that children's positive response to the teacher brings positive feelings of accomplishment and a confirmation for the teachers that they are in the right profession. This perhaps holds the key to teacher satisfaction and retention. Estola et al.'s (2003) study confirmed that teaching involves feelings and that the teacher's connection with her students, and their successes, appeared to validate their choice of profession. Hansen (1995) agreed when he suggested individuals *called to teach* perceive it as a means to both serve others and yet gain personal satisfaction. This sentiment has been echoed in other studies on early childhood teachers' choice of profession. Some teachers see the essence of their role as nurturers who educate and foster children's successes out of their love and concern for children's well-being (Court et al., 2009). If teachers view their role as nurturers and work out of their love and concern for children's well-being, this translates into a caring teaching posture; this emotional link between the teacher and learner must not be underestimated. Estola et al.'s (2003) study showed that success shown by learners gives rise to joy and pleasure while failure leads to feelings of disappointment, sadness, and sometimes anger. This symbiotic relationship in terms of bi-directional emotional well-being for both teacher and children is worth further research because a better understanding of this phenomenon may hold a key to greater teacher satisfaction and retention.

Called to empower colleagues and families

My participants' perception of their *calling* included the *call* to support and empower their colleagues and other adults whom they come into contact with at work. Empowering families, with an emphasis on women, was the focus of some participants. Elizabeth talked about the satisfaction she achieved from empowering "the number of parents, particularly mothers" whom she worked with, with the belief and confidence in themselves and how they 'have gone on to become teachers, and also gone on to become something else other than mothers, and follow their dreams.'" Judith spoke in the same vein when she made the connection between quality care for children and empowering women to have the choice to go back to work or be stay at home mothers. "Supporting women through early childhood education means giving them

opportunities to make huge contributions to society.” Thelma talked about supporting the early childhood community and fellow colleagues when they were struggling through a difficult phase by proactively helping people “who may be feeling in that lonely space to say, well, actually there are people out here who would, even if just listening on the phone ... ”

Called to care for the community

The *calling* is also perceived as an avenue to give back to the community. Thelma, one of the participants, talked about the spirit of sharing and giving back to the community, “We cannot exist as a selfish unit because the world would just become a worse place for it. So, we have to share our energy with other people ... we both believe that there’s a way of giving back to the community.” Daisy had similar aspirations but saw her role as passing on attitudes and skills to the next generation with a focus of regenerating thinking and hope. This care and concern for the world translates into Daisy’s keen awareness that her *calling* was driven by an exacting desire “to bring a deep concern for future generations but hopes her *calling* can be harnessed as a means to shape a different future for a particular community. Elizabeth shared similar aspirations for her people:

I believe that teaching is my place in the Maori world, that I will lead my people through teaching ... my role is to lead them from a dark place into the light... I believe I can shape a different future for Maori and it will be about education and empowerment and self-esteem.

This confidence that one is called to work within a specific community was echoed by Kelly, who felt convinced she must work in a particular community:

Yeah, I tell people I am going out in the box and am going to die there (at the early childhood centre where she works) and have my funeral there and get carried out in a box. I have purposefully only worked in South Auckland. I have chosen not to work outside of that area. I have always worked in centres where there has been a minority of European ... I don’t see myself being in any other centre.

There appeared to be a lack of literature which explicitly discusses a teacher’s *calling* in terms of supporting children beyond the families and community. However, there is a perception that individuals who feel *called to teach* perceive this as a means to serve others while gaining a personal sense of satisfaction (Buskit et al., 2005), or as means of effectively using their talents and gifts for the good of society (Cammock, 2009). A recurring theme is the desire to serve others, specifically children and community and there is an element of altruistic aims in teaching (Cammock, 2009; Court et al., 2009).

There is a desire to respect the rights and autonomy of learners and this is endorsed by Vanderstraeten and Biesta (2006) and Korthagen (2004). Vanderstraeten and Biesta (2006) advocate for educating learners towards freedom while Korthagen (2004) promotes the development of great human beings who contribute to society by loving and respecting people.

Origins of the calling

When describing their motivations for joining the teaching profession, teachers talked about inner motivations and external considerations, which include significant people in their lives, contextual and historical circumstances (Court et al., 2009), as well as the *call* of practice inviting teachers to respond to the *call to teach* (Buskit et al., 2005; Hansen, 1995; Mayes, 2002). The findings of this research study concur with this. The teachers recognised that their motivation to join the teaching profession is an intersection of inner yearnings and external circumstances which reinforced their initial desire to teach.

Internal promptings

In this study, some participants acknowledged that the source of their *calling* came from within. Some participants found it difficult to pinpoint the exact beginnings of their sense of the *calling* to teach. Judith struggled in describing the origins of her *calling* because she perceived it as always being there in the first place:

...as far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a teacher ... it's just been part of who I am ... It has always been there ... I can't actually say when because it has always been part of me...I guess there's always been that passion ... it's just been part of who I am.

Another participant, Elizabeth, reflected on her innate ability to work with children, “I always had the ability to work with children, whether they were my siblings or family...”. Thelma concurs when she described the origins of her *calling* as an “initial knowing” and the “initial passion”.

It appears from these participants' comments that the inner self plays a part in a teacher's response to the *call to teach*. There is some evidence from the literature that concurs with this finding. Some regard a *calling* as an inner urge or prompting that seems to necessitate a response (Buskit et al., 2005). Palmer describes this inner prompting as “the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation” (Palmer, 2000, p. 8) and strongly advocates that vocation should not be perceived as a voice external to ourselves, nor a goal to be achieved and prescribed by

others/external forces but recognised as an internal gift of the essence of who we are. He says that the deepest vocational question has to do with “Who am I? What is my nature?” and “What ought I do with my life?” (Palmer, 2000, p. 15). Self identities are complex and Zohar and Marshall (2000) liken the inner self to Spiritual Intelligence (SQ), which provides our understanding of the meaning and value of life.

Both Gibbs (2006) and Cammock (2009) proposed that everyone is unique and this uniqueness lies in certain qualities that make a person fit to be a teacher. Teaching is used by many teachers as a means to express their latent gifts and talents. Another group of writers consider early childhood education teachers as altruistic individuals who respond to the teaching vocation because it provides them with the means to express their personality and engage with the environment in their own personal style (Holland, 1985; Roe, 1957, cited by Court et al., 2009). An examination of the teacher’s *calling* needs to take into consideration the uniqueness of each individual’s response to the call/invitation to teach (Cammock, 2009) and how the response is very personal in nature (Snook, 2003). This opens the vista for viewing a teacher’s *calling* because all these writers seem to suggest that there is a positive co-relationship between inner knowing, latent qualities within oneself and feeling called to a profession. Both Gibbs (2006) and Cammock (2009) recommend the need to investigate closely the possibility that teachers view teaching as a viable means to express strengths, passions and unique gifts that are innately latent in individuals (Cammock, 2009).

In my study Elizabeth made a connection between the inner prompts to teach and the realisation that this *call* is predetermined. She likened her inner knowing to the sense of being predisposed. She described the origins of her *calling* this way, “My destiny in some ways was set ... Maori believe that your future, much of your future is predisposed and you have to be open to it” while acknowledging that circumstances like a random comment for her to apply for an early childhood teaching course reinforced that set path. She suggested that the origins of one’s *calling* are at an intersection of internal promptings and external invitations when she says, “I see it as a journey that I don’t choose. It has been chosen for me ... It is us responding to a *call* from somewhere else.” This appears to be a caller outside oneself who beckons the participant to the profession.

Cammock (2009) speaks in the same vein when he beckons teachers to surrender themselves to something larger than themselves and to become what they were destined to be. He suggests that it is the spiritual aspect of the *calling* which provides teachers

with the opportunity to connect with their unique predestined purpose in life. Cammock (2009) and Palmer (2000; 1998) both stress the importance of teachers recognising the *call to teach* because the denial of the call throughout their lives results in dire consequences. Thus, there appears to be a suggestion that what we are called to do is predetermined.

Likewise, Susan also talks about “something within her” which draws children to her and entertains the possibility that “maybe these children know more about what’s inside me than I do.” This invites us to consider the possibility that while Susan knows that there is something within her that draws her to the children, they in turn draw her to the profession. Mayes (2002), Hansen (1995) and Buskit et al. (2005) all suggest that the teaching world itself can take on the role of the caller inviting the person to respond and experience the *call* in the real world of practice.

Crossroads of internal promptings and external invitations

While there were participants who recognised the role played by inner promptings in drawing them to teaching, there were others in my study who understood the origins of their *calling* as crossroads between an internal desire to teach and external circumstances which reinforce the internal prompting. Some participants perceived internal motivations as a foundation to the response to teach, others saw the role of external influences in helping shape that original sense of *calling* from within. The findings from this research study do not indicate clearly whether internal desire or external circumstances play a stronger role in drawing early childhood teachers in New Zealand to teaching.

There were participants who understood their *calling* as something arising from within but recognised that external circumstances serve to reinforce that initial prompting. Thelma described the origins of her *calling* as having a sense that “it is something I always wanted to do ... from a very, very young age” but acknowledged that “things that happened in my life”, for example, her upbringing at home, meeting her husband who shared a common passion for children and her migration to New Zealand, “just kept reinforcing” that “initial knowing” from a very young age. This was echoed by Susan who recognised that sometimes, being in the wrong place opens up a clarity of her inner *calling*, “In my heart I knew I was in the wrong place ... I really want me to be a teacher ... it definitely comes from within.”

The growing body of literature concurs with the finding of my study that the origins of one's *calling* is perceived as an intersection of a personal response from within and an invitation from without. Cammock (2009) proposed two levels to a *calling*; internal and external. He suggests that a *calling* provides the teacher an opportunity to use gifts and talents (acts as internal prompts) to serve others (acts as external invitations) and thus the *calling* makes the crucial connection between the individual and the public. Both Hansen's (1995) study and Estola et al. (2003) study revealed that the teachers were motivated to teach out of a desire to defend children. *Calling* perceived this way requires the teacher to be sensitive to the caller from without. This may come in the form of a response to the *call* by children or colleagues (Estola et al., 2003) and is related to practice (Mayes, 2002). This perception is evident in Susan's insistence that the children *call* to her and appear to know more about her than herself. There is thus a clear signal from the literature that an examination of a teacher's *calling* needs to be cognisant of the role of practice in helping teachers recognise a *call to teach*. Hansen (1995) examined how a person recognises a *call to teach* in the first place and concluded that it is the teaching practice which *calls* the person to meet his/her obligation. Buskit et al. (2005), concurred when they suggested that a *call* represents a prompting, urging the individual to respond and experience the *call* in practice.

External circumstances, in the form of significant people and events played a considerable role in the origins of *calling* for some of the participants. They helped point the participants in the direction of teaching. Kelly talked about the expectation from others of her as a teacher due to her mother being a teacher and how she had consciously did not want to emulate her mother. Samantha talked about the pivotal role played by her father but acknowledged that the opportunity given to work with the children and the challenges that came along with it "helped shape ... gave it a direction ...". Similarly, Daisy described

the nuns, the significant people ... [who] were saying hold on to your dreams, ... those visions and make them a reality.

And her family

the origin of my calling would have been deeply rooted in my own family ... as ... mother... worked part-time ..., in a kindergarten ... I think it goes further than my actual point of career choice ... it goes back to my family ... I think I was singled out , ...to fulfil a dream, a hope for them.

Susan talked about the role of a senior partner in the law firm she was working in identifying that she belongs to the teaching profession, prompting her with, "You

missed your vocation in life and you should have been a teacher.” This triggered a chain of events which led her to early childhood teaching.

Contextual influences, as a mediator for choice of profession, emerged in the literature that was consulted. Court et al., (2009) revealed that it was common for close family members (especially mothers) or for key figures in the teachers’ social surroundings to influence a choice for preschool teaching as a career. The importance of mother as a socialising agent in influencing choice of profession is consistent with previous research (Katzir, Sagi & Giklat, 2004, cited by Court et al., 2009; Patton & McMahon, 1997, cited by Court et al., 2009) where preschool teachers who chose teaching as a career early in their career, note that family members and teachers were chief influences to their decision. The findings of this study concur, that significant others, like mothers and fathers, as well as, colleagues and children, help teachers recognise, clarify and sustain a *call to teach* at significant points in the teacher’s teaching life. Mayes (2002) suggests that the biographical and political dimensions of a teacher’s *calling* needs to be further examined.

This research study revealed that key past events played a significant role in teacher’s recognition of a *call to teach*. Susan, Samantha and Thelma, being immigrants to the country, recognised the huge part played by their decision to migrate to New Zealand in shaping their *call to teach*. Daisy talked about the critical influence of her time spent with the catholic nuns and Kelly talked about recognising her *calling* when she was working at a specific early childhood centre within a specific community. Susan talked about working in a legal firm which helped her recognise that teaching was her *calling* and not law. Thus, there is clear evidence from this study that significant people and events influenced the initial recognition of the *call to teach* and helped the teachers recognise the shifts in their experiences with the *calling*.

Both Estola et al. (2003) and Mayes (2002) put forth the notion that vocation is multifaceted and is finely woven within each teacher’s view of life. This view is influenced by the tradition of education, which in turn varies in different social, cultural and historical contexts. It is acknowledged that this research of mine was a small study and, as such, was able to capture only a small slice of the contextual influences to some teacher’s *call to teach*. What comes up strongly is the role played by family history, significant others and significant events in a teacher’s *calling* but the teachers did not talk about historical and political dimensions of teaching. This might be due to the

altruistic nature of early childhood teaching where teachers have a tendency to focus on care and the emotional aspects of teaching. I would agree with Mayes (2002) that there is a need to examine more closely the broader contextual influences in the form of the socio-cultural-political landscapes of their teacher's world.

Holland (1985) brings the discussion back to the uniquely personal nature of a teacher's *calling* when he put forward the idea that contextual influences play a significant role in choice of profession as teaching is also perceived as a way for the individual to express his or her personality. He makes the link between these two influences by pointing out that an individual's personal need and preferences has evolved out of the interaction between family and environmental influences and genetic factors. By placing genetic factors on the table for consideration, Holland concurs with Cammock's (2009) proposal that a *calling* can be perceived as a way for teachers to use their gifts and talents to serve others. This also moves the literature examined closer to the conclusion that the origins of a person's *calling* is an intersection of factors from within (biological inheritances/dispositions/temperament/latent gifts) and without (contextual influences).

Calling: A spiritual experience

Within the language used by the participants to describe the origins of their *calling*, there was an element of spirituality/religiosity for some of the participants. Samantha spoke about seeking God's direction:

I prayed and I thought, "Lord, I really don't want to be here anymore (with reference to her job in a law firm). I don't want to spend the rest of my life causing other people's misery. I really want to be a teacher.

or another time when she affirmed her desire to be a teacher with God:

Lord, you know I want to be a teacher", and he is telling me, "Sometimes, you are in a place for a purpose ...

Interestingly, Thelma uses a similar language to unpack the origins of her *calling* when she describes the significant role played by God by placing her in unique situations and with people who have helped shape the course of her *calling*:

... we are also Christians and we have a very strong belief that – our journey to New Zealand was first of all by the grace of God.

Well, I believe it is God. ... definitely it is a Being beyond ourselves that ... – puts that initial passion into you and puts the right people in your pathway to nurture that

However, not all participants attach religious connotations to the spiritual *call to teach*. Elizabeth viewed the origins of her *calling* in terms of predestination and that her

“destiny in some ways are set ... because Maori believe that ... much of your future is predisposed”. There is a need for a person “to be open” to what one is predestined to do in the first place. This supports Cammock’s (2009) proposal that the spiritual aspect of a *calling* includes surrendering to something larger than oneself and becoming what one were destined to be. Some of the teachers in my study have described their spirituality with less religious undertones.

While I believe that the teaching profession entails a spiritual element, current literature seems to indicate that it translates into religious notions of healing (Mayes, 2002), sacrifice and serving others (Cammock, 2009; Estola et al., 2003; Hansen, 1994; Palmer, 2000), and there is also literature that describes spirituality without religious overtones. This perspective holds the position that caring relationships, respect for the rights of learners, supporting freedom and nurturing learners to be respectful and loving citizens of a society, embody spirituality (Giles, 2006; Giles & Kung, 2010; Palmer, 2004; 2000; 1998; Snook, 2003). Another perception of the spiritual dimension to a teacher’s *calling* is where teachers are described as an archetype of spirit with the role to guide, heal (Mayes, 2002), love, nurture, care (Court et al., 2009), teach with loving authority (Game & Metcalfe, 2008), and teach within a curriculum of hope (Hansen, 1995; Elbaz, 1992; Estola, 2003; Goldstein, 1997; Noddings, 1984).

The spiritual nature of a teacher’s work is captured in the way teachers describe their work as, “delightful, invigorating, mysterious, frustrating, passionate, precious and sacred” (Buskit et al., 2005, p. 112). My study revealed teachers who also expressed their teaching with similarly embodied words, such as, “care”, “love”, and “passion”. If spirituality is defined in this way, the teachers, who may not describe their work with religious overtones, still embrace spirituality as caring, loving, respectful relationships (Giles, 2006; Giles & Kung, 2010; Palmer, 2004; 2000; 1998; Snook, 2003) and having that connection with something larger than oneself in the universe which includes a recognition that one was born to teach (Cammock, 2009, Hansen, 1994; Palmer, 2000).

Calling experienced as patterns and metaphors

Linguistic analysis used in Court, et al.’s (2009) study helped reveal beliefs, values and experiences expressed through figurative language, and especially metaphors. This provided the opportunity to examine implicit meanings through a different prism so as to understand how participants viewed their world and the work they do. The story-telling used, which included both the uniqueness of language and metaphors, allowed

for better understanding of the story teller, her story-telling and how her life is lived (Ashrat-Pink, 2008, cited by Court et al., 2009). Metaphors were used by many of the participants to express their teaching journey. The teachers sought to capture an evolution of their *calling* through metaphors.

Linguistic analysis, specifically an analysis of the use of metaphors by participants, revealed the teacher's perceptions of their evolution in their *calling* through a growth process which included being open to challenges and new ways of thinking and doing. Metaphors were also used to describe the ebb and flow of a teacher's life. In describing her interactions with her *calling* over time, Daisy likened it to life itself, moving in cycles like seasons, and talked about the need for teachers to grow alongside change.

We go through seasons. I am definitely in a later season now and ... am beginning to understand as I progress in my teaching, that learning and teaching is synonymous with life and therefore life changes as we do as teachers as they grow ... we are with growing alongside change as well.

Samantha viewed growth as seeking new ways of teaching and relating to children and a commitment to "never, stop growing." Thelma saw her teaching career in distinct *spaces*; she described her initial teaching experience as a *dangerous space* because she didn't "feel challenged anymore because you think you have reached ... the end goal and so at that time it was really good for me to move ... " She described the next phase when she moved to New Zealand as "a whole new chapter opened and a whole new way of life and new way of thinking started for me."

It appears from these teachers' stories that some teachers perceive their *calling* as moving in distinct patterns with corresponding shifts, and new ways of thinking and doing. There appears to be awareness that teaching involves the ability to recognise phases and be open to changes which leads to new ways of thinking and doing. Sykes (2003) propose that this *call* is often spoken of as having a beginning alongside a deepening experiential sense of ownership and understanding (Sykes, 2003). Albeck (1987, cited by Court et al., 2009) concurred when he suggested that choice of profession is an on-going process, is dynamic and moves responsively through an individual's life cycle between inner motives and external motivations. A question worth pursuing in future research is the co-relationship between inner motivations and external circumstances that shaped the teacher's *calling* over time.

This study indicates growth and maturity in the way the teachers perceived and lived out their *calling* in the real world of practice. The literature I read suggested that a

teacher's professional practice is influenced by the changing nature of a *call to teach* (Intrator, 2005; Noddings, 2001; Palmer, 2000; 1998). There was the suggestion that teachers at the outset of their career appear to focus on feelings and their instinct to serve as a teacher. However, the more experienced teachers, appeared spoke of their vocation using less emotional language and appeared to focus more on professional conduct and accountability, as well as, responsibilities. Does this mean that when teachers enter the profession, they are more idealistic in notions of their *calling* but the world of real practice modifies the *calling*? Should this move over time from the personal nature of teaching to that of a professional concern? This study, based on the views of a small number of experienced early childhood teachers, revealed the contrary. Their language was still based on feelings and talked much about the desire to serve children and families under their care but there was little evidence that it was just rhetoric. My participants showed a growing appreciation of their *call to teach* and changes to their original motivations, due to their lived experiences, only served to enrich and extend the original motivations to teach.

Another question worth examining is how teachers sustain this *call to teach* in a complex, dynamic, and uncertain world of professional practice. An assumption in current literature is that there appears to be an ebb and flow in a *calling*, it evolves over time, is dynamic in process, and appears to be shaped by practice (Estola et al., 2003). While some teachers appear true to a *calling*, there are others who lose sight of their *calling* and this leads to a sense of staleness, discord, cynicism and hopelessness (Casbon et al., 2005). There can be twists and turns through the course of a teacher's career, punctuated with doubts and crises which are all related to practice (Estola et al., 2003). While acknowledging that the teaching profession can prove to be challenging, there is a call to help teachers stay optimistic and sustain a sense of hope in their vocation. This offers the suggestion that the key to resiliency in teaching is a sense of optimism and sense of self-worth. The early childhood teachers in this study showed the ability to live hopeful lives, firmly anchored in self-knowledge. They taught out of strong values and ethics based on their belief that early teaching is a profession rooted in care and concern for others. Perhaps this area of research needs to be further explored to confirm the suggestion from my data that early childhood education is indeed a unique profession which attracts altruistic people and that there are certain special dispositions that make certain people fit to be an early childhood teacher (Gibbs, 2006 ; Sykes, 2003).

The dynamic nature of a teacher's *calling* is captured in Buskist et al.'s (2005) recommendation that gaining a better insight into teaching, requires that the concept of vocation needs to be examined as a living concept instead of rejecting it as an obsolete and religious construct of the past. Thus, an investigation of how a *calling* may change over time is worthy of further research. While this study has captured a glimpse of the New Zealand early childhood teachers' perceptions and experiences of the *call to teach*, research needs to be done to further illuminate how the *calling* is a living concept that can only be understood through an understanding of how the *calling* is lived in practice.

Calling experienced as returning to the original sphere of one's vocation

Some participants, while acknowledging that there is growth and development in one's teaching life, spoke of the cyclical nature of one's *calling* and describe how one returns to the original sphere of one's vocation.

Samantha used the metaphor of the *ladder* to describe the evolution of her teaching career. She saw her teaching life evolving with distinct phases, and saw herself returning to the original core of her *calling*:

It is something in you ... it evolves - it has its ups and downs.... In this process of evolving ... I always come up to phases ..., I understood something and I was back at the same end of the ladder.

Participants showed an understanding of ebbs and flow in their *calling*. Elizabeth highlighted the cyclical nature of her *calling*. She recognised that the core of her *calling* remained even when the focus changed:

It is a different call but it is still about teaching but I am called to do something else but it is always about teaching.

As she reminisced on her life as a teacher, she realised that it began with children at the early childhood centre, but there was a shift in the journey when she felt called to working with families, then to a tertiary environment and now she sensed a call back to the community again. She had gone full circle but there was a narrowing down on the focus of her *calling*:

I am going to continue to teach. ... – my teaching will be even more narrow – so that I am working mainly with Maori – young people as in teenagers and parents, adults because I believe our future is in the young adults, young people.

Likewise, Kelly spoke about remaining true to the essence of her *call*, her desire to intentionally work within one community only, and described it vividly.

Yeah I tell people I am going out in the box and am going to die there and have my funeral there and get carried out in a box. I don't see myself being in any other centre.

These stories suggest that while the focus of the teachers work grows and changes, they have a tendency to return to the original sphere of their vocation. Literature examined revealed the evolving and dynamic nature of a teacher's *calling* and that while some stay true to their calling, there are others who lose hope (Estola et al., 2003). There is little literature on teachers who go through different phases in their teaching journey but ultimately return to the original core of their *calling*. It is hoped this study will serve as a catalyst for others to pursue a study specifically in this area.

Calling sustained through relationships with critical friends and mentors

The participants cited the important role played by critical friends and mentors in clarifying, provoking and sustaining their *call to teach*. Mentors were perceived as people who helped make meaningful connections between ideas and practice. Samantha saw a mentor as someone who “helps you in unfolding your potential.” Judith described a mentor (a centre manager) who modelled great leadership and helped clarify her *calling*. She “was instrumental” in her growth as a teacher by supporting her and believing in her:

..., she influenced me a lot actually ..., believing in me, , ... giving me the space and the time ..., talked to me, listened, tried to listen to my ideas and not just listen to them but she valued them ... made me feel like I had something to contribute.

Critical friends can be colleagues who provoke and challenge one's *calling*. Daisy cites the sense of collegiality and the role played by colleagues in challenging and stimulating one another to keep the teacher's work alive. Similarly, Thelma talked about the dual role of the mentor; to challenge and to support a colleague through difficult times. She advocates strongly for a mentor in a teacher's teaching life:

You have periods where you ... do feel deflated and uninspired and that's when I personally believe ... that each and every person in early childhood must have a mentor of some kind, whether it is a good friend, ... somebody who can always push that button a little bit.

and now sees herself mentoring others:

I can really support other people who are now maybe in that same space that I was ... because sometimes people just need, ... to verbalise their problems and while they are verbalising, they are solving it.

This study suggests that a critical friend/mentor can serve to enrich a teacher's teaching life by helping a teacher to recognize and help shape his/her *calling*. The mentor also supports the teacher through the ups and downs of the teaching journey. There has been no literature on the significant role played by mentors in an early childhood teacher's teaching life. This study has thus provided a foretaste of the role played by mentors in sustaining the *call to teach*. This theme has come up strongly and consistently in the participants stories indicating that it is a worthy variable to be further researched as a factor in teacher retention. This has implications on teacher education programmes and also in-service teacher education programmes, specifically on the role of mentors as a possible strategy to help teachers manage the complex and uncertain world of teaching.

By using the narrative approach through semi-structured interviews this research provided the teachers the opportunity to tell their stories about their vocation and what it means to experience teaching as a *calling*. Few research projects have captured the voice of early childhood teachers/teacher educators about their *calling* to teach. Chater (2005), while acknowledging that teachers' voice are beginning to be heard, advocates that more of these voices need to be heard. Estola (2003) propose that it is the responsibility of researchers in the field of teacher education to allow opportunities for teachers to tell their own stories. Likewise, Clandinin et al. (2009), when examining the stress that teachers endure teaching in changing societal landscapes, advocates that readers listen to teachers' stories; both those who choose to remain in the profession and those who choose to leave. It is hoped, that this study has opened up such 'storied spaces' for teachers to articulate their thoughts about their *call to teach* and in so doing release teachers from a passive state to provoke more thoughts on their *calling*.

Chater (2005) recommends that there is much that the public, potential teachers, educational managers and policy makers, can learn from the teachers' stories in terms of the professional demands of teachers and the challenges of keeping commitment alive. It is hoped that in some ways the findings of this research will provide a catalyst for teachers' voices to be heard.

Summary

This chapter has highlighted some of the important perceptions and experiences of a teacher's *calling*. It has discussed the multifaceted nature of the call and how it is experienced in practice and over time. It is suggested that the teaching profession appears to attract altruistic people who are drawn to teaching for personal reasons and

teachers perceive their *call to teach* as having an ethical, moral, spiritual and emotional dimension to it.

It is proposed that teachers recognise their *calling* as intrinsically motivated and this inspires them to reach for higher ideals. Supporting others, especially the marginalised, appears to frame the core motivation to teach. These teachers perceived their *calling* as a way to care, serve and advocate for children so as to bring about positive outcomes for children, their colleagues, community and humanity in general.

The *calling* is experienced at an emotional level. The teachers consistently described how the *call to teach* has brought them lots of joy, love and passion for what they do which sustains their *call to teach*. The teachers felt called to care and serve, and literature concurs on this emotional aspect of the *calling* where teachers also spoke with energy, enthusiasm and passion for their love of teaching and that it brings much joy and pleasure (Estola et al., 2003). Relationships stimulated a teachers' sense of the *call to teach* and brings intrinsic satisfaction and hope to a teacher's life. Mentors and critical friends play a significant role in clarifying, refining, provoking and sustaining a teacher's *call to teach*.

Teachers recognised that both inner motivations and external considerations, which included significant people, contextual and life events, all played an important role in a teacher's *calling*. The *calling* needs to be understood as an intersection of internal desire and external circumstances which reinforce and help shape that original sense of *calling* from within.

Educators need to consider the suggestion that teaching is a special *calling* which requires a good fit between the disposition of the teacher and the requirements of a unique profession (Sykes, 2003) since the teachers in this study are alluding us to the possibility that there are certain qualities, in particular altruistic qualities, that draw a person to teaching because it is perceived as a caring profession. This has far reaching consequences on teacher education, teacher recruitment and teacher retention.

The participants' stories also suggest that an understanding of a teacher's *call to teach* needs to be cognisant that it is a lived experience and is continuously evolving. This evolving nature of the *calling* is captured by the metaphors used by the teachers to reveal the growth and distinct patterns with corresponding shifts, and new ways of thinking and doing.

In the concluding chapter, suggestions will be provided for future research possibilities that arise from this research, limitations of this research is discussed, and recommendations are made with regard to implications of my findings to teacher education, in-service teacher education and education in general.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction

This inquiry is now completed, but the impact of the research experience on me continues because of my passion and interest in the teacher's choice of profession, the teaching self and teacher effectiveness. This concluding chapter has been organised to outline the argument of the thesis, significant findings from the study, implications of the research, and recommendations for further research and professional practice.

Argument of the thesis

Early childhood teachers who perceive the work that they do as a *calling* understand their *call to teach* as a living and evolving experience. They are drawn to the teaching profession out of an internal, altruistic desire to love, care, support and advocate for children and community. External circumstances, as well as, significant people, reinforce that initial prompting and help shape its direction and growth. The teachers involved all highlighted the emotional, ethical, moral and spiritual dimensions of the *call to teach*. They all stay true to their *calling* out of an intrinsic motivation. For them teaching is lived as a hopeful experience and inspires teachers to reach for higher ideals. Finally, their *calling* is sustained through meaningful and satisfying relationships with children, mentors/critical friends and families/communities.

Significant findings

The significant findings are grouped around the following topics:

- Calling: Internal promptings and external invitations
- Calling: Care, support, advocacy
- *Calling*: Understood and lived
- *Calling*: Perceived and lived as a spiritual experience
- *Calling*: Experienced as patterns and metaphors
- *Calling*: Sustained through relationships
- *Calling*: Expressed through figurative language

Calling: Internal promptings and external invitations

This study highlighted a number of key areas considered to be essential to an understanding of New Zealand early childhood teachers'/teacher educators' perceptions and experiences of their *calling to teach*. The study has shown how these teachers

perceive the origins of their *calling* as an intersection of inner desires and external circumstances. A teacher's *call* is recognised as an inner knowing of one's desire to work with children and external circumstances, including contextual influences and both significant events and people, which help reinforce an initial desire to teach and shape its direction. In other words, internal and external factors can draw people to teaching. The findings from this study do not indicate clearly whether internal desire or external circumstances play a stronger role in drawing early childhood teachers in New Zealand to teaching. However, there appears to be a positive co-relationship between inner yearnings, innate talents and abilities, and external invitations from practice and external circumstances in motivating a person to teach.

Calling: Care, support and advocacy

The teachers recognised that the *calling* was a means to serve children in particular, and family, community and humanity in general. A consistent theme that arises from their stories was a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of the marginalised. Altruistic motivations drew them to struggling, abandoned, lost and difficult children who didn't seem to fit in. Their desire to support and empower goes beyond children to the colleagues and families with whom they come into contact. This also translates into a political expression of advocacy and social justice for all. This *call* to care expands to the community. Some teachers perceived their role as passing on attitudes and skills to the next generation with a focus on regenerating thinking and hope; others saw it as an avenue to serve and give back to the community. This means that early childhood teachers perceive early childhood teaching as a means of concerned for the well-being of others, and that it is a caring profession rooted in relationships.

Calling: Understood and lived

It seems to me as a researcher that it is important to acknowledge that the teacher's *calling* can only be understood as a lived experience. The teachers in this study consistently gave examples from practice to illustrate their notions of what the *calling* means to them. Their stories revealed the emotional aspect of early childhood teaching where they consistently talk about their enjoyment, love and passion for their work. They appeared to derive intrinsic satisfaction from their work and described how working in early childhood education brought them joy and inspired them to reach for higher ideals. This emotional link between the teacher and learner needs emphasising. While it was encouraging to note that the teachers in this study focused on the joy that teaching brings and there was no mention of stress, burnout or wanting to leave the

profession, this runs contrary to the literature on poor teacher well-being and teacher retention. This could possibly demonstrate that teachers, who consider their work as a *calling*, derive huge satisfaction from their teaching that it sustains their *call to teach*; or it could be a limitation due to the small sample involved and the participant selection approach to them through ‘snowballing’ (Cohen et al., 2000). By using this sampling approach, the researcher depended on informants who self-identify as having a calling to teach to introduce participants who shared similar understandings of their choice of profession. They in turn recommended others. Thus, the finding that there is a possible co-relationship between those who feel called to teach, and job satisfaction, could be limited to a group who share these similar characteristics.

Calling: Perceived and lived as a spiritual experience

All of the teachers clearly articulated the spiritual dimension of their work. They all described the love, passion and enjoyment experienced in their day to day interactions with children and it is this inner satisfaction that motivates and sustains their *call to teach*. A spiritual dimension appears to give hope, depth and meaning to a *call to teach*. The teacher’s sense of spirituality is also captured in their desire to pass on spiritual gifts, such as, kindness, patience, joy, respect and peace to the next generation. Those who mentored student teachers wanted to regenerate their passion for teaching to this next generation of teachers.

There were some teachers who understood a spiritual dimension of their *calling* as a relationship with a spiritual being who is central to their *call to teach*. For some of these teachers ‘God’ is perceived as the caller who plants the desire and bestows the gifting and talents. God is also seen as the power that defines, shape and direct their teaching journey. Events and people are perceived to be given by ‘God’ to help shape the teaching path. However, there were teachers who passionately described their spirituality with less religious undertones. This includes their definition of spirituality as a predisposition to one’s destiny and the need to be open to it. In other words, this means that teaching can be understood as a spiritual experience but it needs to be examined not as a religious construct of the past but as rooted in loving, respectful relationships which gives meaning to a teacher’s *calling* and nurtures both the giver and receiver of love and care alike.

Calling: Experienced as patterns and metaphors

The teachers used metaphors to capture their interactions with their *calling* over time. They showed an awareness that their teaching lives moved in distinct patterns with corresponding shifts, growth and development. There appeared to be an awareness that teaching involved the ability to recognise phases in one's career and being open to changes which led to new ways of thinking and doing. While some teachers understood that their *calling* evolved over time, others saw themselves invariably returning to the essence of their *calling*. Those who saw the evolution of a *calling*, recognised that a *calling* is subject to on-going dynamic processes which then lead to growth, change and regeneration. However, there was also the perception from others who consider the essence of a *call* unchangeable in that they may move on to work in other fields of early childhood education but find their way back to the core of their work with children. All teachers in this study showed a growing appreciation of their *call to teach* as it unfolds over time.

Calling: Sustained through relationships

The interviewed teachers concurred that critical friends/mentors play a significant role in clarifying, provoking and sustaining their *call to teach*. These critical friends and mentors include centre managers and colleagues who support and encourage teachers on their teaching journey. They helped to identify and develop a teacher's potential and helped teachers make meaningful connections between theory and practice. Mentors who held leadership role modelled good leadership by providing the space and time for meaningful dialogue and conversations which provoked thinking and challenged teachers to think beyond what's immediately before them. They were also a source of support during challenging times. There is limited literature on the role of critical friends/mentors in sustaining one's *call to teach* yet it has emerged consistently in each story. This suggests that the significance of mentors has escaped the scrutiny of researchers. This research has provided a foretaste of the role played by critical friends and mentors in sustaining and enriching the teacher's *call to teach*.

Calling: Expressed through figurative language

By using a narrative approach through semi-structured interviews, this research provided teachers with the opportunity to tell their stories about what it means to experience teaching as a *calling*. This study opened up 'storied spaces' which helped reveal the personal-practical meanings that teachers ascribe to their *calling* and their experiences with a *calling* over time. Metaphors were used by many of the participants

to express their teaching journey. Teachers sought to capture the developing nature of their *calling* through figurative language. The dominant form was the metaphor and these included 'space', 'ladder', 'seasons' and 'chapters' to signify the growth of a *calling* in distinct phases. It also helped explain the ups and downs of the teaching journey and the need for teachers to be responsive to change and open to regeneration. The image of the 'season' in one's teaching life was used to make clearer the perception that learning and teaching is synonymous with life and just like growth is synonymous with life, teachers too need to grow alongside change. The metaphors strengthened what was explicitly stated by the teachers and exposed genuine perceptions of their interactions with their *call to teach* over time. This highlights for researchers the importance of paying attention to form as well as content in narrative analysis.

Implications

There are a range of implications that arise from the findings of this research. The first relates to the origins of teachers' *call to teach*. The findings indicate that a teacher's sense of *call* is at the crossroads of an internal desire from within and external circumstances. This has practical implications for teacher education. Awareness of reasons and circumstances that lead people to the teaching has an impact on teacher identity formation and suggests the importance of examining personal narratives in teacher education. Student teachers, who are more aware of the origins of their *calling* and the reasons for choosing the early childhood profession, might be better prepared for their personal encounter with the profession. This self-aware narration provides beginning teachers the opportunity to set realistic educational goals based on deeper awareness of their beliefs and motives.

The second implication relates to the recognition that early childhood teaching is an emotional endeavour. The teachers in this study focused significantly on the emotional aspect of teaching. They spoke about the effects of children on their sense of satisfaction and fulfilment in the job. I suggest that this emotional link between the teacher and learner must not be underestimated. Further investigation of this phenomenon by both management and professional development teams at centres might hold the key to teacher satisfaction and retention. Efforts to improve teacher retention need to acknowledge that it is more complex than policies suggest. In considering the emotional well-being of teachers, strategies might include teacher recruitment processes that take into account teacher disposition-job fit; teacher education programmes that allow opportunities for beginning teachers to reflect upon the personal transformations

that occur in their journey towards becoming teachers; and professional development courses in early childhood centres that help teachers make connections between the teaching *self* and their place within a community of practice.

The third implication relates to the dynamic nature of a *call to teach* and how that *call* can only be understood in relationship to practice. The teachers in this study described the distinct patterns of growth changes and recommend that staying true to a *calling* involves keeping hope and passion alive as well as having an attitude of being open to change, growth and regeneration. The teachers talked about the importance of critical friends/mentors in clarifying the *call to teach*. This suggests that an ongoing exploration of the teaching journey may provide teachers with an evaluative dimension, enriching their insight into their educational work and helping them to examine their daily choices and consider new, creative ways to improve and be agents of change.

The fourth implication from this research is the importance of narrative in early childhood teaching. This study has shown that teachers' stories are a rich medium for capturing the authentic voice of practice. The teachers' personal voices, which exude passion and hope, are motivating and inspiring. Their stories serve as the voice of hope for those whose *calling* may have gone stale and are thinking of leaving the profession. Their stories on the evolution of a *calling* to teach are both inspirational and practical at the same time. They may hold a key to teacher retention. There is much that the public, potential teachers, educational managers and policy makers, can learn from narratives presented to them regarding the teacher's motivation to teach and how their *calling* is understood, lived and sustained over time in the real world of practice.

The final implication of the findings relates to evidence from this research study that this particular group of early childhood teachers are driven by the altruistic aim of serving, and what keeps them in the profession is their love and passion for children. It would appear that what engenders satisfaction and meaning in a teacher's work is not found in material gains but in intrinsic benefits. This finding goes contrary to the current notion that teachers operate within market conditions and are therefore isolated individuals competing for personal gains. This research finding indicates a more humanistic image of the teacher who gains satisfaction from relationships with children and working in community with colleagues and families. This finding will be of interest to educational policy makers working towards increasing teacher retention amidst shifting educational landscapes.

Recommendations for further research

In this section I offer five recommendations for further research that might build on the findings of my research. The first recommendation is that further research be undertaken on the origins of a teacher's *calling*. This study has shown that teachers perceive their *calling* to be an intersection of internal desires and external circumstances. There have been a number of studies which have examined contextual influences on a teacher's choice of profession but there is a lack of studies on the inner motivations that prompt teachers to choose teaching as a profession. I would like to recommend that more research be conducted specifically on the mediating influence of personality and internal motivations on the teachers' teaching journey. This is recommended because the teachers interviewed for this study appeared to show altruistic tendencies. It is proposed that any attempt to understand the teacher's life need to take into consideration the co-relationship between inner motivations and external circumstances in shaping a teacher's *calling* over time.

Secondly, I would recommend that narratives as a research tool be more widely used in capturing teachers' voices on education studies in general and early childhood education, in particular. Narratives are recommended so as to provide the space for the authentic voice of early childhood practitioners to be heard. The teachers' personal voices in this study which exuded passion and hope might serve as a voice of hope to motivate and inspire those who are considering leaving the profession. My findings also indicate that teachers who perceive their vocation as a *calling* tend to be hopeful and are intrinsically motivated. Further research into how teachers sense of *calling* evolves over time in changing societal changes and demands, is worth considering as the focus of this research is only on those teachers who perceive their profession as a *calling*.

Thirdly, I recommend further research be undertaken on the early childhood teachers' perception of the essence of early childhood teaching. The findings from this study indicate that these teachers choose early childhood teaching as a profession out of the primary desire to support, care, love and empower young children. Further research needs to be done to examine the relational nature of early childhood teaching because it is perceived as a profession rooted in care and serving others. Further inquiry needs to be done to help uncover how teachers who perceive their role as that of nurturer and which entails an element of self-sacrifice might lead to relationships which while rooted in love and care, subsumes the learner's right to autonomy.

Fourthly, I recommend that the emotional and relational nature of early childhood teaching, be more closely investigated. There are numerous studies which confirm that over-regulation and bureaucratisation is a threat to teacher well-being but this study indicates that the source of teacher well-being is emotional satisfaction. Thus, it is recommended that studies be done to confirm or negate this research finding on the emotional nature of early childhood teaching.

The final recommendation is that more research needs to be done on the dynamic nature of a *call to teach*. The teachers for this study talked about the distinct patterns of growth changes and recommended that staying true to a *calling* involves keeping hope and passion alive as well as having an attitude of being open to change, growth and regeneration. It is recommended that studies using the Appreciative Inquiry approach be used to capture and engender that sense of hope in the teachers' life at early childhood centres. Hope appears to be provided by mentors in the way they help clarify and help shape a teacher's *call to teach*. There is insufficient study on the role of mentors in sustaining a teachers' life, and there is no such study specific to early childhood teachers in New Zealand. Further research needs to be done to confirm the mentor's role in sustaining a teacher's *call to teach*.

The strengths and limitations of this study

This research has provided the space for the authentic voice of practice to be heard. In using semi-structured interviews, which provided storied spaces, the teachers were able to reflect on their experiences with the *calling to teach*. Leaving the questions open, meant the teachers were recounting their lived experiences in their own terms and many expressed that it was a cathartic process. This study also confirms the power of stories in capturing authentic educational experiences. In addition, the strength of this study is that the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face manner. The participants' choice of place of interview meant they felt at ease while interviewed which enabled qualitative, extensive, and descriptive data from participants in their context.

Issues of generalisability are always a concern with qualitative case studies (Cohen, et al., 2000; Gillham, 2000; Bassey, 1999). This study has revealed that a teacher's *calling* is not generalisable; it is personal and unique to the individual personality, life experiences and contextual influences. However, the findings presented in this study indicate that early childhood teaching is an emotional endeavour and that any understanding of a teacher's *calling* needs to be cognisant of the fact that it is lived in

practice. One cannot be understood without the other. This research provides some refreshing insights for helping teachers live through often times stressful changing environments. This finding suggests that alleviating stress is not simply about working conditions that are less regulated, but in giving more attention to the altruistic intentions of early childhood teachers and the way they perceive teaching to be deeply personal and relational in nature. Much of what has been uncovered in this study will be useful because there has not been any study to date in New Zealand on the early childhood teacher's perceptions and experiences of their *call to teach*. This study thus serves as a catalyst for other studies on a teacher's *calling* in New Zealand.

A limitation of this study relates to the sample size. However, the research project needed to be manageable and as such it is accepted that the findings are merely indicative. Another limitation relates to the time available to carry out the research. The participants provided rich, descriptive data and with more time, perhaps a more critical reflection might have been possible. A second round of interviews would have been valuable to allow me as researcher to develop a deeper appreciation of the metaphors used in their stories. However, this small study contributes insight to add to overseas studies by Hansen (1995), Estola, et al. (2003) and Chater (2005) on a teacher's *calling*. I would like to record, for others contemplating the use of case study methodology, that collecting data in an inductive manner engenders a sense of excitement, but has drawbacks for the novice researchers. I had to learn how to block out literature that I had read on the teacher's *calling* so as not to colour the interview process.

Concluding comments

I believe that the contribution I have made with this study is that it has added further insight into a teacher's perception and experiences of the call to teach. It has also provided some initial findings on a teacher's calling as it is understood and experienced by early childhood teachers and teacher educators in New Zealand, something that has not been done before.

This study has concurred with some overseas studies, which highlighted the altruistic and emotional nature of early childhood teaching. It also raised awareness on the significant role played by critical friends and mentors in shaping and sustaining a teacher's call over time. Since this study involved a small sample size, I believe it would encourage other early childhood teachers and educators in New Zealand to research further on this topic so as to confirm or challenge the findings of this research.

I believe this study has demonstrated the importance of narratives in giving teachers a personal voice to contribute to the conversations surrounding their profession. It has provided an opportunity for educators and the public alike to view the teachers teaching life.

I acknowledge that the research has made an important contribution to my personal growth as a novice researcher. This study has given me the opportunity to embark on a small research project which gave me hands on experience on conducting a qualitative case study research, writing a research report and it has given me the growing confidence and skills to engage in further research.

My experience in conducting this research has confirmed my belief that teaching is a hopeful vocation and this positive spirit sustains the teacher's *calling* in increasingly challenging environments. It is the responsibility of educators to pass on this song of hope to future generations of teachers.

I look forward to future research sojourns which will encourage others to consider the significance of the teaching self to teaching and the role of teacher educators in helping student teachers access this source of good teaching. To this end this thesis, a novice researcher's attempt at appreciating the teacher's *call to teach*, has not only further fuelled my interest in teacher identity, but has given me the confidence to contribute more to current discourse on the early childhood teacher's teaching life.

List of References

- Aronson, J. (1994). A Pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 2(1), Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.html>
- Ayers, W. (2001). *To teach: The journey of a teacher*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Bassey, M. (1999). *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*. Buckingham, United Kingdom: Open University Press.
- Bassey, M. (2002). Case study research. In M. Coleman, & R. Briggs (Eds.). *Research methods in educational leadership and management*, pp. 108-121. London, United Kingdom: Paul Chapman.
- Bell, J. (1999). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education and social Science* (3rd ed.). Buckingham, United Kingdom: Open University Press.
- Best, J., & Kahn, J. (1993). *Research in Education* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Billot, J. (2003). Falling between the real and the ideal: The role of the New Zealand principal. *Management in Education*, 16(4), 28-30.
- Bishop, R. (1997). Interviewing as collaborative storying. *Education Research & Perspectives*, 4(1), 28-47.
- Borko, H., Liston, D., & Whitcomb, A, J. (2007). Genres of empirical research in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), 3-11.
- Bouma, G. D. (1996). *The research process* (3rd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Burns, R. (2000) *Introduction to research methods* (4th ed.). Frenchs Forest, NSW, Australia: Pearson Education.
- Bushe, G. R., & Kassam, A. F. (2005). When is Appreciative Inquiry transformational? A meat case analysis. *The Journal of Applied behavioural Science*, 41(2).
- Buskist, W., Benson, T., & Sikorski, J. F. (2005). The call to teach. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24(1), 111-122.
- Brown, C. P. (2009). Helping preservice teachers learn to teach for understanding in this era of high-stakes early education reform. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36, 423-430.
- Cammock, P. (2009) *The Spirit of Leadership: exploring the personal foundations of extraordinary leadership*. (Rev) Christchurch, New Zealand: Leadership Press.

- Carson, T. R. (1986). Closing the gap between research and practice: Conversation as a mode of doing research. *Phenomenology and Pedagogy*, 4(2), 73-85.
- Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Educational Researcher*, 27(1), 5-12.
- Casbon, C.H., Shagoury, R., & Smith, G. A. (2005). Rediscovering the call to teach: a new vision for professional and personal development. *Language Arts*, 82(5), 359-386.
- Chater, M. (2005). The personal and the political: notes on teachers' vocations and values. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 26(3), 249-259.
- Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., Downey, C.A., & Huber, J. (2009). Attending to changing landscapes: Shaping the interwoven identities of teachers and teacher educators. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(2), 141-154.
- Codd, J. (1990). Educational policy and the crisis of the New Zealand state. In S. Middleton, J. Codd, & A. Jones, (Eds.) *New Zealand education policy today*. Wellington, New Zealand: Allen & Unwin.
- Codd, J. (1998). Professional accountability and the education of teachers. *Policy and Practice in Education*, 50(2), 149-162.
- Codd, J. (1999). Educational reform, accountability and the culture of distrust. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 34(1), 45-53.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London, United Kingdom: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Collins, M. (1998). Dimensions of critical pedagogy. In *Critical Crosscurrents in Education* (pp. 63-77). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co.
- Cooperrider, D., & Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative Inquiry in organisational life. *Research in Organisational Change and Development*, 1, 129-169.
- Cossentino, J. M. (2006). Big work: Goodness, vocation, and engagement in the Montessori Method. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(1), 63-92.
- Court, D., Merav, L., & Ornan, E. (2009). Preschool teachers' narratives: A window on personal-professional history, values and beliefs. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 17(3), 207-217.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Devito, J. A., O'Rourke, S. & O'Neill, L. (2000). *Human communication*. Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education.

- Durka, G. (2002). *The teacher's calling: A spirituality for those who teach*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Elbaz, F. (1992). Hope, attentiveness, & caring for difference: The moral voice in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 8, 421-432.
- Estola, E. (2003). Hope as work-student teachers constructing their narrative identities. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 4(2), 181-203.
- Estola, E., Erkkila, R., & Syrjala, L. (2003). A moral voice of vocation in teachers' narratives. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and practice*, 9(3), 239-256.
- Fenech, M., Waniganayake, M., & Fleet, A. (2009). More than a shortage of early childhood teachers: Looking beyond the recruitment of university qualified teachers to promote quality early childhood education and care. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(2), 199-213.
- Game, A., & Metcalfe, A. (2008). The teacher's vocation: Ontology of response. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 27, 461-473.
- Gibbs, C. (2006). *To be a teacher: Journeys towards authenticity*. New Zealand: Pearson Education.
- Gibbs, C. (December 2002). *Cultural efficacy: Implications for teachers and teacher education*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education-New Zealand, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Giles, D. L. (2005). Philosophy to ideological praxis: A component theory approach to developing an educational framework. *Journal of Christian Education*, 48(3), 25-33.
- Giles, D. L. (2006, January). *Phenomenology: Researching "lived experiences" in the hope of phenomena*. In R. Smith (Chair), *Three perspectives, three cases: Exploring phenomenology and phenomenography in education research*. Symposium on Researching Phenomena conducted at AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Giles, D. L. (2007). Humanising the researcher: The influence of phenomenological research on a teacher educator. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*. 3(1), 6-12.
- Giles, D. L. (2008). *Exploring the teacher-student relationship in teacher education: A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/537>.
- Giles, D. L., & Alderson, S. (2008). An appreciative inquiry into the transformative learning experiences of students in a family literacy project. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 48(3), 465-478.

- Giles, D. L., & Kung, S. (2010). Using appreciative inquiry to explore the professional practice of a lecturer in higher education: Moving towards life-centric practice. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50(2), 308-322.
- Gillham, B. (2000). *Case study research methods*. London, United Kingdom: Continuum.
- Glazer, S. (ed.) (1994). *The heart of learning: spirituality in education*. New York, NY: Penguin/Putnam.
- Glazer, S. (1999). *The heart of learning*. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.
- Goldstein, L. S. (1997). Teaching with love, a feminist approach to early childhood education. *Rethinking Childhood*. 1. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Goodfellow, J. (2008). Presence as a dimension of early childhood professional practice. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33(1), 17-22.
- Hansen, D. T. (1994). Teaching and the sense of vocation, *Educational Theory*, 44, 259-275.
- Hansen, D. T. (1995). *The call to teach*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hansen, D. T. (1998). The moral is in the practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14, 643-655.
- Hansen, D. T. (2001). *Exploring the moral heart of teaching: Toward a teacher's creed*. New York, NY: Teachers' College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2001). Emotional geographies of teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1056-1080.
- Holland, J. L. (1985). *Making vocational choices*. Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Howe, K. R. (2001). Qualitative educational research: The philosophical issues. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 201-208). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Intrator, S. M. (ed.) (2005). *Living the questions: Essays inspired by the work and life of Parker J. Palmer*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Intrator, S. M., & Scribner, M. (Eds.) (2003). *Teaching with fire: Poetry that sustains the courage to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Joldersma, C. W. (2006). Not only what or how, but who? Subjectivity, obligation, and the call to teach. *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, 10(1), 61-73.
- Kelchtermans, G. (1993). Getting the story, understanding the lives: From career studies to teachers' professional development. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 9(5/6), 443-456.

- Korthagen, F. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 77-97.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Malm, B. (2004). Constructing professional identities: Montessori teachers' voices and visions. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 48(4), 397-413.
- McGloin, S. (2008). The trustworthiness of case study methodology. *Nurse Researcher*, 16(1), 45-55.
- Marshall, J. M. (2009). Describing the elephant: Preservice teachers talk about spiritual reasons for becoming a teacher. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 36(2), 25-44.
- Mayes, C. (2002). The teacher as an archetype of spirit. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 34(6), 699-718.
- Mayes, C. (2005). The teacher as shaman. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(3), 329-348.
- Maynard, M. (1994). Methods, practice and epistemology: The debate about feminism and research. In P. S. Maykut, & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective* (pp. 10 - 26). Portsmouth, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and Expanded from "Case Study Research in Education"*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, he whaariki mātauranga mo nga mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education (1993). *The New Zealand curriculum framework*. Wellington, New Zealand: Government Print.
- Mutch, C. (2005). *Doing educational research: A practioner's guide to getting started*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach in education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Noddings, N. (1995). Teaching themes of care, *Phi Delta Kappan*, May, 675-679.

- Noddings, N. (2001). The caring teacher. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 99-105). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- O'Neill, A. (1998). The politics of teacher education in a market driven system: An editorial introduction. *Policy and Practice in Education*, 50(2), 113-120.
- Palmer, P. J. (1983). *To know as we are known: A spirituality of education*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.
- Palmer, P. J. (1997). The heart of a teacher. Identity and integrity in teaching. *Change*, 29(6), 14-21.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. J. (1999). The grace of great things: Reclaiming the sacred in knowing, teaching and learning. In S. Glazer (Ed.), *The heart of learning. Spirituality in education* (pp. 15-32). New York, NY: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Palmer, P. J. (2000). *Let your life speak: listening for the voice of vocation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. J. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: the journey toward an undivided life* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rivalland, C. (2007). When are beliefs just 'the tip of the iceberg'? Exploring early childhood professionals' beliefs and practices about teaching and learning. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 32(10), 30-37.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructivism. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 189-214). London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications.
- Shelby, C. L. (2003). Care ethics in education. *The Educational Forum*, 67(4), 337-342.
- Snook, I. (1998). Teacher Education: Preparation for a learned profession? *Policy and Practice in Education*, 50(2), 135 - 148.
- Snook, I. (2003). *The ethical teacher*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Sumison, J. (2002). Revisiting the challenge of staff recruitment and retention in children's services. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 27(1), 8-13.
- Sykes, M. (2003). Teaching is a special calling. *Scholastic Early Childhood Today*, 17(7), 4.

- Thrupp, M., & Willmott, R. (2003). *Educational management in managerialist times: Beyond the textual apologists*. Maidenhead, PA: Open University Press.
- Vanderstraeten, R., & Biesta, G. (2006). How is education possible? Pragmatism, communication and the social organisation of education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(2), 160-174.
- Wisker, G. (2001). Choosing appropriate research methodologies and methods. In *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*, 137-144. New York, NY: Palgrave.
- Wisker, G. (2001). Research questions and methods - the processes of research, kinds of research, choosing methodologies. In *The postgraduate Research handbook*, 113-126. New York, NY: Palgrave.
- Wellington, J. (2000). Approaches to educational research. *Educational Research: Contemporary Issue and Practical Approaches*, 15-33. London, United Kingdom: Continuum.
- Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. (2000). *Spiritual intelligence - The ultimate intelligence*. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Topic: The nature and experience of a teacher’s calling: A case study of New Zealand Early Childhood Teachers/Teacher Educators

Key Questions	Prompts	Subsidiary questions
1. Introduction question: Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself and where you sit in the ECE context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work history • Current work place • Connections to ECE 	<p>When did you start teaching? Was it in the early childhood, primary, secondary or tertiary sector? Where are you working now?</p>
2. How do you describe the nature of your ‘calling’ as a teacher?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understandings of notion of ‘calling’ • Focus on definition attached to experiences 	<p>How would you describe the moment when you understood, “this is the profession for me?”</p>
3. How do you explain the origin(s) of your calling?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the call • Being conscious of the calling • The call’s origins is described • Influences – internal and external • Random or intentional response? • Conscious/unconscious? 	<p>What prompted you to join the teaching profession? What has drawn you to teaching? Can you think about the reasons why you are an early childhood teacher? Internal influences (it comes from within you)? External circumstances? Response to the calling? How long have you felt the calling?</p>
4. How have you experienced your calling in practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to the call • Seasons/Phases/Layers • Movement • Conscious/unconscious decisions? • Motivations • Mentors 	<p>Has there been any change in the roles that you have taken in ECE from the first time you responded to the call to teach? Were the decisions you made due to internal or external motivations, for example, did mentors or circumstances play a role in that move from one role that you play to another? Were there significant people who have influenced the evolution of your call to teach?</p>
5. How have you interacted with your	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivations for staying? • Ups/downs 	<p>You have been in ECE for the past – years. What motivates</p>

<p>calling?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors • Managing dry seasons 	<p>you to stay in this profession? Were there ups and downs in your teaching life? What do you think plays an important role in sustaining your call to teach?</p>
<p>6. How has your calling changed over time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts and motivations • Futuristic view of shape of calling 	<p>Do you see an evolution in your calling over time? Do you see changes in the way you feel called to teach? Have you felt called elsewhere? Where do you see yourself in your profession, say 10 years from now?</p>

Participant Information Sheet



Project Title

The nature and experience of a teacher's calling: A case study of New Zealand Early Childhood Educators

An Invitation

Warm greetings! I am an early childhood teacher educator teaching at Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT). I am also currently studying at AUT University. I am committed to exploring meaningful ways by which teacher educators and teacher education programmes can help student teachers sustain and deepen their 'call to teach'.

My current research focuses on the teacher's calling; exploring the teachers' experiences of their 'call to teach'. I am conducting my research on the early childhood teacher's experiences of their 'call to teach'. I seek a deepening appreciation of how this call is experienced by individual early childhood teachers/educators and what is the nature of this call over time?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. The purpose of this invitation is to provide you with some details about the project and what it involves so, you may decide whether you are interested in participating by sharing stories and experiences your of calling. I would like to stress here that participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time up until the completion of the data collection phase.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature and experiences of a teacher's calling. This research will also be used in the production of a thesis for the Master of Education, and may result in other publications.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

You have been invited to participate in this research project because:

1. You are an early childhood teacher/educator in New Zealand.
2. You have a minimum of five years experience in teaching.
3. You self-identify as a teacher who has experienced a 'call to teach'.

What will happen in this research?

Once you consent to participate in the research, you will be involved in a one-off, semi-structured interview where you are asked to recount experiences that show your 'call to teach' and your interaction with this call over time.

I would like to interview you at your convenience. The stories that I am asking you to share is personal and unique to you. Thus, the interview will be designed and carried out in way that gives you ample opportunity to describe your own experience in a way that suits you. The information I am gathering in this interview is through semi-structured questions and lasts between 30 minutes to 45 minutes. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed. I will return the transcripts to you for you to check for their accuracy and for editing as you choose. Your stories will aid the increasing conversations on a teacher's calling by contributing to the literature on this notion of calling as it is experienced within the early childhood sector. Your stories will be presented in the form of a thesis report. A summary of the final findings will be presented to you in due course.

What are the discomforts and risks and how will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Having an interview recorded by audiotape may be a new experience for you, or you may feel ill at ease with this procedure. I have considered this and have worked at minimising your discomfort by allowing you to choose the date, time and place of interview. Every effort will be made to put you at ease.

I am mindful of the personal nature of the stories that you will be sharing with me. During the interview you may feel uncomfortable or reluctant to go any further with the sharing of your experiences. I would like to assure you that that participating in this research is voluntary at all times and you choose what you want to share with me and if at any time you begin to feel uncomfortable or ill at ease, the interview may be terminated at your request. If the interview raises any issues for you that you would like to talk about with a professional counsellor, I can also help you to get in touch with AUT Health and Counselling (ph. 09 921 9998) at the Akoranga Campus.

Confidentiality is assured because I will transcribe the interview personally and you will receive a copy of the transcript to check, edit, and make changes as you choose. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts and final report to further protect your privacy. Any identifiable features will also be removed. The information you share will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purpose.

What are the benefits?

This is an opportunity for the voice from early childhood practitioners to speak. The findings of this research will help us gain a better insight into how calling is manifested in the act of teaching. Your unique individual experience will help us capture the New Zealand ECE teachers' experiences of this 'call to teach' as it unfolds over time. The research seeks to bridge the gap identified between general studies on a teacher's calling and a specific study of New Zealand ECE teachers' calling, something that has not been completed before. An understanding of teacher's experiences of their call to teach will also contribute to teacher education programmes. Participation in this research project may also enhance your personal appreciation and understanding of your 'call to teach' and this may lead to further reflection on the nature of the interrelationship between a teacher and his/her 'call'.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The cost of participating in this research will be your time only. The interview is expected to take a maximum of 30 - 45 minutes, and the checking of the transcript for accuracy may take another 15 to 30 minutes. All together, the cost to you will be about 45 to 75 minutes of your time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Please think through this invitation to participate in this research. I would very much appreciate being able to contact you again in one week for your decision. If you need further time to consider, please let me know.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you are willing to participate in this research you will be asked to sign a consent form which I will make available to you.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, a summary report will be provided to you by postal mail at the completion of the project. A copy of the full report will also be made available if and when requested.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor,

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Susie Kung

Ph. 09 9688765 Ext. 7153

Mobile 021 2138328

Email: Susie_kung@yahoo.com

Susie.kung@manukau.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Nicola Chisnall

Ph. 921 9999 Ext. 7233

Email: nicola.chisnall@aut.ac.nz



Consent Form

Project title: The nature and experience of a teacher's calling: A case study of New Zealand Early Childhood Teachers/Teacher Educators

Project Supervisor: Nicola Chisnall

Researcher: Susie Kung

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 27 January 2008
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one):
Yes No

Participant's signature:

.....
.....

Participant's name:

.....
.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
Date:

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.