KEY COMPETENCIES LEADING TEACHING AND LEARNING:
IMAGINING NEW POSSIBILITIES IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

This thesis is to contribute further to the understanding of how key competencies can transform teaching and learning, and therefore the curriculum. The vision for key competencies (dispositions, capabilities or habits) is to enable students to fulfill their potential and to prepare them for their future in which they will participate in society. Current research and the literature have examined the origins of key competencies both internationally and nationally and continue to seek answers on whether they have had the intended impact on education.

The focus of this research is to examine teachers' experiences of transformational education involving key competencies, how the New Zealand Curriculum key competencies have impacted their practice and what is the potential when key competencies lead teaching and learning. Finally, the focus is to identify the tensions and challenges met when key competencies are at the forefront of teaching and learning.

The research is based on a qualitative paradigm and draws on a practitioner research approach encompassing a critical theory philosophy. The data is collected by conducting seven semi-structured interviews with experienced teachers from four different schools by employing a narrative inquiry approach that draws on practitioner life stories. A focus group was then used to explore emerging themes from the interviews. The data has been analysed combining a narrative analysis aiming to understand how people think through events over time and in context, along with a thematic analysis focusing on the content of the narratives.

A key finding was how significant the personal values and beliefs of a teacher influenced them to teach in schools that have a vision that resonates with their purpose of education, being about the holistic growth of a child. The experiences in their practice lead them to think differently about teaching and learning and how key competencies have the potential to deliver a curriculum for the needs of all students, including a future-focused education. In summary, the participants described the prospect of key competencies leading teaching and learning in the New Zealand Curriculum; transforming it beyond what it is currently.
Recommendations are that a systemic change is required to the continual effort for schools to develop a deep and shared comprehension of the complexity and potential of key competencies. There is a challenge to be braver and to have a sense of urgency in order to transform the ‘status quo.’ Teachers are asking to be heard, for the profession to be mentored by teacher experts and to actively collaborate between theory, practice and vision. They are also asking policy makers to consider the impact they have on education, and whether a new way of governing education is required.
**Acknowledgements**

I was inspired and encouraged about the future of education by the seven participants who participated in the research project. Their willingness to be open, and to share their stories left an impact of hope and inspiration on me. They all had such strong convictions as to the purpose and vision of education that they had overcome barriers to create, challenge and be innovative in pushing the boundaries of traditional teaching and learning. My sincere thanks for their stories and entrusting them to me.

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ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. II

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ IV

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING THE INQUIRY ............................................................................. 11

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 11
  2007: A new vision for education ....................................................................................... 12
  New Zealand Curriculum framework 2007 ....................................................................... 14
  The Current Challenge ....................................................................................................... 15
    Forewarned about the enormity of the task .................................................................. 16
    The current education climate ....................................................................................... 17
  Innovation is strategic ....................................................................................................... 18
  The profession of teaching .............................................................................................. 18

The aim and questions ........................................................................................................ 19
  The significance of the aims and questions to the challenge ........................................ 19
  The researcher and declaration of interest in this project ............................................... 21

The significance of the research ....................................................................................... 22

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................ 24

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 24

What is the purpose of key competencies in education? .................................................... 24
  Finding Utopia: The new direction of education ............................................................ 24
  New Zealand rethinking the purpose of education ......................................................... 24
  The Definition and Purpose of Key Competencies .......................................................... 26
    From the origins of the DeSeCo project ..................................................................... 26
    From the origins of the New Zealand Curriculum ...................................................... 27
  Background to the origin of Key Competencies: ............................................................ 30
    The depth and breadth of the DeSeCo project ............................................................. 30
    Defining Curriculum ................................................................................................. 32

The potential of key competencies ................................................................................... 32
For students to prepare them for their future ................................................................. 32
Equity for all in education ............................................................................................... 33
Teacher Practice .............................................................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
Transformative .................................................................................................................. 34

The issues of implementing key competencies .................................................................. 35
The complexity of key competencies .............................................................................. 35
Lost in Translation ........................................................................................................... 36
The vision and value of education .................................................................................. 36
Ongoing and reflective effort ......................................................................................... 37
Impact on teachers .......................................................................................................... 38
Key competencies from acting as agents of change ....................................................... 38
Change of direction in New Zealand ............................................................................... 39

Identifying the connection between theory and practice ............................................... 40
Teacher Practice ............................................................................................................ 40

Research into identifying the gap between theory and practice ...................................... 41
Time, experience and theory is needed ......................................................................... 41
Identifying transformative practice .............................................................................. 42
Further research needed ............................................................................................... 44

Summary .......................................................................................................................... 44

CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH APPROACH .......................................................... 45

Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 45

Qualitative paradigm ...................................................................................................... 46
Critical theory .................................................................................................................. 46
Connection between critical theory and this study ......................................................... 47
Critical practitioner research: teacher as researcher ..................................................... 47
The view of research as praxis ...................................................................................... 48

Narrative inquiry through lived stories ......................................................................... 49
Lived stories .................................................................................................................... 50
Methods of data collection........................................................................................................51

The Selection of Participants ..................................................................................................51

Overview of Participants ........................................................................................................52

Life Stories using a semi-structured interview ......................................................................52

Gathering stories ......................................................................................................................53

Focus group ..............................................................................................................................54

The Process .................................................................................................................................54

Analysis .....................................................................................................................................54

Validity and trustworthiness .....................................................................................................56

Trustworthiness and transparency .............................................................................................56

Ethical considerations ..............................................................................................................57

Conclusion ................................................................................................................................57

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....................................................................................................58

Introduction ...............................................................................................................................58

The participants .........................................................................................................................58

Setting the Scene ......................................................................................................................59

The person the teacher .............................................................................................................59

Government policies impact on teaching ..............................................................................60

The impact of key competencies on teaching practice ............................................................61

The journey to valuing Key Competencies ..............................................................................62

Personal experiences, beliefs and values ................................................................................62

The vision of a school and leadership team ............................................................................63

Disruptors in their practice ........................................................................................................63

Thinking differently about teaching and learning .................................................................64

The teacher and learner relationship .......................................................................................65

Teachers as learners ..................................................................................................................66

Autonomy ..................................................................................................................................66

Professional learning and Collaborating with Colleagues .......................................................66

The potential of key competencies for leading teaching and learning ....................................68
**Key competencies are the driver of curriculum** ................................................................. 69

‘Learning gets better’ for the student....................................................................................... 70

Transform curriculum .................................................................................................................. 70

**Influence beyond the classroom** ............................................................................................. 71

The tensions and challenges placing key competencies at the forefront of learning............... 71

**The purpose of education** ........................................................................................................ 72

Understanding the key competencies......................................................................................... 73

Educating communities................................................................................................................. 73

**The culture of National Standards** .......................................................................................... 73

Pressures of assessment............................................................................................................... 74

**How we measure learning** ..................................................................................................... 75

**Systems** .................................................................................................................................. 76

**Voice and influence of teachers and schools** ....................................................................... 76

**What’s Next?** .......................................................................................................................... 77

**Summary of the narratives** ...................................................................................................... 79

Findings of the focus group......................................................................................................... 80

To place key competencies at the forefront of teaching and learning. ..................................... 81

**CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS** ............... 82

**Introduction** .............................................................................................................................. 82

The journey of the teacher........................................................................................................... 83

**The teacher and the purpose of education** ........................................................................... 83

Tensions and Challenges of the Purpose of Education............................................................. 84

**Thinking differently about teaching and learning** ............................................................... 85

Teachers as learners...................................................................................................................... 85

Teacher and student roles ............................................................................................................ 86

**Tensions and challenges for thinking differently about teaching and learning** .................. 87

The culture of National Standards............................................................................................... 87

Support of communities................................................................................................................ 88

Mental health issues....................................................................................................................... 90

**The teacher profession’s understanding of the complexity and potential of key competencies.** 90
Key competencies leading curriculum: theory + practice + vision = challenge to the status quo ................................................................. 90

The potential of key competencies .................................................................................................................................................. 91

Systems: a tension and challenge ................................................................................................................................................. 92

Teachers Beyond Classrooms: Impact and influence ...................................................................................................................... 93

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................................................................... 95

Strengths and limitations of the research .................................................................................................................................. 97

Areas for further research ............................................................................................................................................................... 99

Recommendations ............................................................................................................................................................................ 100

In summary ...................................................................................................................................................................................... 102

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................................................................. 104

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION ................................................................................................................................. 111

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM ............................................................................................................................ 113

Participant Consent Form .................................................................................................................................................................. 113

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ............................................................................................................................................ 115
ABBREVIATIONS

ACARA – Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

CCP – Country Contribution Process

DeSeCo – Defining and Selecting Key Competencies

MOE - Ministry of Education

NZCER – New Zealand Council for Education Research

NZC – New Zealand Curriculum

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Process of DeSeCo.................................................................31

Figure 2: Difference between shallow & deep practice..............................43
CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING THE INQUIRY

The Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced a new vision for education in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007),

*Young people who will be confident, connected and actively involved, lifelong learners.* (p. 38)

Introduction

The key competencies were first introduced in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) in 2007, originating from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) project called Defining and Selecting Key Competencies (DeSeCo) which was to define essential skills needed for individuals to lead a successful and responsible life for a well-functioning society (Rychen & Saynik, 2003). With the introduction of key competencies into New Zealand’s curriculum (MOE, 2007) the challenge for educators was to allow them to be transformative and for them not to be assimilated into current practice. Thus creating professional dissonance and proactively reconsidering aspects of teaching and learning would lead to rethinking the taught curriculum. The understanding of competencies being at the centre of teaching and learning would allow them to go beyond surface meaning so that they did not become simply ‘ticking the box,’ (Bolstad, Gilbert, McDowell, Bull, Boyd, & Hipkins, 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013).

Although it has been ten years since the launch of the NZC, the vision and the purpose of education continues being advocated internationally. Australia launched their curriculum in 2014, and the overview states that their, ‘vision is for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens,’ (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) n.d). Educationist, Sir Ken Robinson (2015) summarises that the purpose of education is ‘...to enable students to understand the world around them, the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens’ (p.xvi).

This thesis explores that when teachers understand the complexity and purpose of the NZC key competencies their practice is transformed, and students develop the attributes
and skills to bring the NZC vision to fruition. The aim is to gather tacit knowledge from experienced teachers to understand the connection between key competencies and transformational practice. Hipkins and McDowell (2013) identified the important factor that more studies were needed from having curriculum conversations through productive researcher/practitioner partnerships. This research project uses a qualitative, critical research theory, and employs the method of narrative inquiry, engaging in conversation and storying around pedagogy and practice. The tacit knowledge will add to the profession as it seeks to explore and identify new insights as to the role of competencies being transformative, and their coherent features of building a future-focused education that is fair and inclusive to all students (Bolstad et al., 2012; Smithers, 2006).

**2007: A new vision for education**

The curriculum in New Zealand went through a revision between 2004 and 2007, and part of the revision was the transition from essential skills to key competencies; ‘these are the capabilities people have, and need to develop, to live and learn today and in the future’ (Ministry of Education, 2007). Prior to New Zealand engaging with key competencies, internationally two reports were central to their origins; Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors, 1996) and Key Competencies for a Successful Life and Well-Functioning Society (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). The reports come out of a changing belief in education that the purpose is to prepare learners for a new century (Delors, 1996; Rychen & Salganik 2002; UNESCO, 2015).

UNESCO commissioned a report; Learning: The treasure within (Delors, 1996) under the premise that education was more than the process of acquiring knowledge and skills. The commission argued that education is primarily about the personal and social development of individuals, groups and societies. Against the backdrop of a new century ‘dawning,’ the commission’s thinking about the next generation of children and young people requested an examination into ‘both the aims and means of education’ (Delors, 1996). From this report two key concepts were identified: ‘learning throughout life’ and the four pillars of learning: to be, to live together, to know and to do. The report was intended to create
dissonance about the purpose of education based on ‘what type of society we wished to live in’ (Delors, 1996; UNESCO, 2015).

UNESCO espouses the deliberate move towards personal and social development away from economic and financial reasons and is poetically summarised by Delors (1996): ‘All societies aim to move towards a necessary Utopia in which none of the talents hidden like buried treasure in every person is left untapped,’ (p. 48).

A few years later, OECD expanded on the foundations of the Delors Report (1996), commissioning the DeSeCo Project to identify key competencies for a successful life and a well-functioning society (Hipkins et al., 2014; Rychen & Salganik, 2003). The authors of the DeSeCo report, Rychen and Salganik (2002), described the context in a time when international discussions were occurring on a more profound understanding of the direction of education, for preparing people for a 21st-century life (Rychen & Salganik 2002). Gonzoni (2002) confirmed that the new century was identifying new insights into teaching and learning. These included new concepts of knowledge, neuroscience advances, the development of cognitive sciences and learning theories, a revival of philosophical arguments involving social versus economic, and the individual over society (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). New challenges facing people and societies were also being identified: the social changes of increased and diverse populations, the explosion of new technologies that are more sophisticated and rapidly evolving, and the demands of the workplace have become more complex (MOE, 2007; Rychen & Salganik, 2002).

The DeSeCo project commenced in 1997 with conclusions and recommendations completed in 2002. It involved over 60 experts and academics and five scholars from different disciplines to identify the concept of competencies, and 12 countries were invited to provide recommendations. A critical analysis of international studies was conducted during the 1990s in OECD countries related to indicators of education outcomes and two international symposiums to finally identify what key competencies will be needed to equip 21st-century citizens (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). The importance of being able to demonstrate the skills of flexibility, adaptability, mobility, creativity and lifelong learning in
a globalised world helped form the criteria used for identifying the key competencies (Rychen & Salganik, 2001). Eventually, three categories of key competencies were identified in the final report: interacting in socially heterogeneous groups, acting autonomously, and using tools interactively (Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

In 2001 New Zealand was one of twelve countries as part of the Country Contribution Process (CCP), a report used in the DeSeCo project. The purpose of this part of the project was for countries to identify and describe national initiatives regarding the measurement and relevance of competencies in different areas of society including political, economic, social and education. Defining and selecting key competencies, this would begin a change of direction in education (Hipkins, 2006; Rychen & Salganik 2002). Finally, it was espoused that key competencies provided both solutions for the individual and society and were transversally allowing for adaptability, ensuring individuals were able to achieve their potential, encourage respect for others, and be able to contribute to producing an equitable society (Oates, 2001; Plisko, as cited in Rychen & Salganik, 2002).

**New Zealand Curriculum framework 2007**

In the foreword, the then New Zealand Secretary for Education specified that this curriculum was a clear indication of what was deemed essential in education. It defines key competencies that are critical to sustaining learning and active participation in society and highlights the emphasis on lifelong learning. “They are the focus for learning – and they enable learning.” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 38).

It is within this setting that the NZC was launched, and marked the introduction of key competencies into the curriculum. The intent was that these key competencies would have a role in building a 21st century curriculum by enabling new connections between traditional practice and new learning opportunities required for all New Zealanders (Burgon, Hipkins & Hodges, 2012; Maharey as cited in Ministry of Education, 2007).
A set of resources were produced by Flockton (2009) to accompany the new curriculum. In this, key competencies were defined ‘as capabilities that people needed in order to live, learn and contribute as active members of their communities.’ The key competencies are critical to sustain learning and to participate effectively in society and work. The connection to the purpose of key competencies from the OECD report is evident in the similarities between the definitions.

New Zealand Council for Education Research (NZCER) cautioned the reality of implementing new concepts and ideas of the NZC to actual practice (Hipkins & McDowall 2013). The research identified that schools and teachers to implement key competencies required dissonance on their current thinking of the purpose of education, or they would merely down shift and assimilate this new thinking about teaching and learning, missing the opportunity of their potential (Burgon, Hipkins & Hodges, 2012; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013). A clear vision for what students’ present and future needs are would provide a catalyst for the current status quo to be challenged (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007).

**The Current Challenge**

The key competencies are a potentially transformative feature of the New Zealand Curriculum. However, the way in which they are understood and implemented in schools points to tensions and challenges that may prevent them from acting as agents of curriculum change. (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013 p.1).

Researchers Hipkins and McDowell from NZCER, present the idea, that intention of introducing key competencies into the NZC was an opportunity to start to think about teaching and learning differently, and a chance for students to ‘be confident, connected and actively involved, lifelong learners’ (Ministry of Education, 2007) in a 21st-century new paradigm of education.
**Forewarned about the enormity of the task**

Rychen and Salganik (2002), forewarned the challenge of implementing key competencies. Contributors to the DeSeCo project acknowledged that teachers’ attitudes and capacities could hinder the process, along with the competencies being used thoughtlessly or over emphasised at risk of neglecting other disciplines (Rychen & Salganik, 2002). Valery’s (1999) statement in the report of ‘everything simple is theoretically wrong, and everything complicated is pragmatically useless,’ indicates the dilemma between theory and application to practice. Therefore, an ongoing effort to combine the theoretical, empirical and reality of practice is fundamental for implementing key competencies (Rychen & Salganik, 2002; Hipkins et al., 2014). The report identified these challenges on implementing key competencies to practice; it is a new field, the multiple and varied definitions of the competencies, the differences of perspective and ideological lenses, the complexity of how to teach competencies (Rychen & Salganik, 2002). The conclusion of the DeSeCo report states that the evolving and adapting process of implementing the competencies is about focussing on the shared principles and big-picture thinking on education rather than the detail or a specific model (Rychen & Salganik, 2002).

Reid (2006) researched how schools in Australia were initially teaching key competencies; the findings identified three current methods of implementation:

1. **Name and Hope** - Identify the key competencies in the curriculum but no other professional development, support or documentation to develop a deeper understanding of them.

2. **Raising Consciousness** - Key competencies are defined with specifications but taught in isolation to the rest of the curriculum.

3. **Embedded** - Key competencies are integrated with the other areas of the curriculum.

Reid’s (2006) research found that the delivery of competencies in the curriculum was an add-on to current programmes, or some teachers thought that they already taught them in their current practice, stating ‘but we already do this.’ Other schools used resources of prepared set activities that ensured the schools gave coverage to the competencies. Reid
(2006) went on to question whether any of these methods could provide the results expected of key competencies, challenging the current thinking and practice of education, and questioning the existing system.

New Zealand would face the same challenges as described above. Researchers from NZCER conducted various research projects on the implementation and perception of the NZC key competencies (Cowie & Hipkins, 2009; Hipkins, 2009; Hipkins & Boyd, 2011; Hipkins, Cowie, Boyd, Keown & McGee, 2011; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013). The findings from the research would identify similar challenges as mentioned by the DeSeCo report and Reid's research paper (Reid, 2006; Rychen & Salynik, 2002). It would appear that the enormity of implementing key competencies has been widely underestimated, and to understand them is to unpack their complexity and potential, to have a shared vision of education. This all requires time and constant professional discourse and development. Key competencies, the NZCER researchers found, have not had the intended impact on the curriculum (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013).

The current education climate

When the NZC was launched in 2007, schools had three years to design their school curricula to meet the vision, principles, values, key competencies and learning areas stated in this framework. New Zealand schools were at the earliest stages of developing their understanding of this new curriculum when the National Party instigated the international standardised movement. National Standards was now part of the NZ education landscape. Research completed by Bonne (2016) "National Standards in their Seventh Year" would provide empirical evidence that the National Standards were narrowing the curriculum and driving the direction of schools.

To have both the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) and The National Standards Information for Schools (Ministry of Education, 2009) implemented within a few years, this researcher suggests had an impact on teachers and their practice and may be a valid reason why most schools have not been able to implement key competencies to
their fullest potential. This research project is interested in whether the findings will have any further insight into this claim.

**Innovation is strategic**

It is espoused from current research and educators that a focus on students’ future and present needs should be considered, enabling a different lens to rethink about the purposes of teaching and learning (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Robinson, 2015). For new theories to apply to practice, educators need to confront and disrupt their thinking if real change and sustainability are to occur (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). The focus on key competencies and their potential requires vigorous imagination and constant reflective practice. This iterative practice allows for principles and ideas to be identified supported by current research and theories. The outcome is for innovative, future-building education for young people. By collecting tacit knowledge, developed through personal experiences from the results of trial and error, misconceptions and changing practice, intuition-like action forms the artistry of a know-how expert. Eerikalan and Puusa (2010) provide diverse examples of teachers who are already understanding and implementing the potential of competencies by rethinking how teaching and learning can confirm strategies needed to transform education, (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins, Bolstad, Boyd, & McDowell, 2014; Robinson, 2015).

*Innovation is strategic when it has significance beyond its immediate context – when it inspires others to innovate in similar ways in their own situation.* (Robinson, 2015, p.234).

**The profession of teaching**

*Those who seek to decide the curriculum to a large extent seek to define teaching [and therefore learning].* (Carpenter, Jesson, Roberts, & Stephenson, 2008).

According to Carpenter et al. (2008) and Goodson (2003), the professionalism of teachers has been eroded. Teachers are no longer as a collective having any input into
curriculum development and have become subject to political whims, leaving them as ‘mechanical methods’ of instruction to espouse the current policies of the day. The ongoing reforms and changes within the profession have left teachers struggling for control of the purpose of education (Carpenter et al., 2008; Goodson, 2003; Shor, 1993; Robinson, 2015).

The aim and questions
This research aims to gather tacit knowledge from experienced teachers to investigate the connection between key competencies and transformational practice. Three questions will guide the direction of this study:

1. How do experienced teachers describe the impact of the New Zealand Curriculum competencies on their practice?
2. What is the potential for teaching and learning if competencies are at the forefront?
3. What are the tensions and challenges of placing competencies at the forefront of teaching and learning?

The significance of the aims and questions to the challenge
The stance taken to purposively select participants that have a deeper understanding of competencies and are either beginning to or are using competencies to impact on their teaching and learning is an essential part of this research project (Carpenter et al., 2008; Goodson, 2003; Hipkins et al., 2014). The research is about documenting stories of these teachers with experience and expertise in this field to add to the existing research. With it being ten years since the NZC framework was launched, storying allows for retrospective views on the journey that teachers have experienced (Goodson, 2003) as they have implemented key competencies into their practice. It is this voice of the teacher that needs to be accepted and valued to lead the teaching profession to support and inspire a shift in practice by thinking more deliberately about students’ current and future needs and evaluating the immediate and long-term views of learning (Carr, 2006; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013).
Bolstad, Hipkins, and McDowall in their research have identified the need for ongoing discussion on the curriculum, and to have exemplars of teacher practice that demonstrates having a deeper understanding of the potential of competencies. The gathering of testimony can be conducted by productive researcher and practitioner partnerships (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013). The researchers acknowledge that time and space between practice and theory is part of the professional development that ensures change, and to recognise that time is needed to filter down new ideas in teaching and learning. The shift in practice will be evident in the intended outcomes in student work (Carr, 2006; Meier, 1995; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013). This research project understands the premise of time and space to allow for teaching and practice to be impacted by key competencies; therefore, all participants in this research have been teaching for at least six years.

Freire (1968), a critical theorist, describes the role of a teacher as a researcher and scholar since the teacher knows their students and their culture. Teachers become ‘warrior-intellectuals’ who are willing to be advocates for their students; to fight for them. Freire argues that ‘the whole activity of education is political in nature’ (Freire, 1968; Shor, 1993). This research project is hoping to encourage schools and teachers to innovate their practice and place key competencies at the forefront of their teaching and learning, to provide an education that supports each learner to reach their potential. If key competencies have the potential to fulfil the vision of NZC by being ‘change agents’ (Hipkins & McDowall, 2013), then this research project is a valuable addition to find answers from experienced practitioners and to offer new possibilities to educators.

Goodson (2003) identifies the significance of teacher ‘life stories’ that include aspects of who they are and what their beliefs are about teaching and learning, their experiences and backgrounds and how these have shaped their practice. The teachers are at ‘the front’ of translating the vision of NZC into a reality for young people. It is for this reason that this research project has focused on the personal journey of a teacher, having them describe how they have interpreted key competencies, their purpose, and how key competencies have impacted on their practice.
The researcher and declaration of interest in this project.

As the researcher for this project, and taking a critical researcher approach, I wish to inform my personal story. I have been a teacher since 1996; education to me is about ensuring each student understands themselves and how they interact with the world. It is about developing each person’s talents and skills so that they know how to reach their potential, personalised to fulfil their own and family aspirations. Education, in my opinion, is not changing fast enough and this is failing students. The weight of the legacy of the industrial and traditional models of school is too ingrained, the rapid reforms and policies coming out of the MOE give little time for teachers, school leadership and communities to stop and think whether this is what our children need, or how it is going to impact their learning.

As a teacher I was influenced by a school’s culture that continuously held up its vision for education, having consistent professional development on effective teaching and learning practice. Parallel to this was growing scientific evidence and changing theories about what our young people need from their education and their teachers. The field of neuroscience had led to a new concept of brain-based learning, and we understood the world was changing with globalisation, technology, and social issues. Our school understood that teaching knowledge was not going to prepare our students current needs for their future.

The introduction of the NZC in 2007 validated our current practice and the anticipation of being part of a pioneering teaching generation was the hope for further innovation and possibilities. To redefine what schools should look like and sound like was espoused by Sir Ken Robinson (2006) Ted Talk - Do Schools Kill Creativity (56,405,914 views as of 04/03/19) and then the follow up to this in an RSA animated visual presentation of his Changing Education Paradigms (2010). The possibilities and hope of changing the education looked imminent.

I was on the leadership team that would review and design the school curriculum, ready for implementation by 2010. We spent much time unpacking the parts to make the whole,
using the resources that accompanied the rollout. The leadership team used an expert that was involved in the writing of the curriculum to challenge our thinking. With all this, I believe when it came to the key competencies we ended up ‘naming and hoping’ and to some extent as teachers we thought that we already did this! In hindsight, I would change many things we did over this time. We did have the best intentions without having a deep understanding of the potential and complexity of key competencies.

Then in 2010, the government of the time introduced policies based on the international standards movement. The enormity of the dissonance between my beliefs of teaching and learning and what National Standards was doing to our schools and children would accumulate in my resignation from teaching in 2013.

By the middle of 2014, I was back in front of a classroom, acknowledging to myself that to change a system you needed to be within it. I needed to prove that within the tight regulations and expectations of the Ministry you could still fulfil the intention of the New Zealand Curriculum vision and the requirements of National Standards. There were pockets of innovation all around the globe and within our New Zealand profession to draw upon, these have come from communities and people that believe in another story of education.

It has taken many years of reflectivity, collaboration amongst peers, and continuous personal and professional research, to come to a place in my teaching and students’ learning where I can see the possibilities of transforming education by placing key competencies, dispositions or capabilities at the forefront of student learning, leading me to inquire, ‘where to next?’

**The significance of the research**

This purpose of this research project is to add to the noise, to keep creating a dissonance in teachers’ and school leadership thinking (Timperley et al., 2007) about using key competencies to lead their teaching and learning. By listening to teachers’ voices about
the ‘why, what and how’ (Sinek, 2009) as they have taught key competencies through their vision for students. The privilege of hearing how each of these practitioner stories will accumulate into ideas and principles to support, encourage and inspire other schools and teachers to navigate their journeys.

Education is political; it is also about giving our young people the best opportunities for them to reach their potential so that they can be active, healthy citizens.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the previous chapter the New Zealand key competencies were contextualised concerning their origin both internationally and nationally. The continued debate in the literature is on whether the key competencies have performed the role that they were intended for, along with arguments as to why this hasn't occurred.

The literature review commences with examining the purpose of key competencies and explores the origins being the process of the DeSeCo project. The project relates to identifying critical issues and ideas that were central to New Zealand’s world view of competencies and has direct implications for this research project.

The review then examines the literature around the potential of key competencies in education and discusses the issues relating to their implementation, then investigates the literature on the connection between theory and practice. Finally, the review will examine the literature to identify where this thesis can add value to the discussion on key competencies being a change agent for the curriculum (Hipkins & Boyd, 2011; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013).

What is the purpose of key competencies in education?

Finding Utopia: The new direction of education

Is the purpose of education to educate all aspects of the individual? A possible trend noted in the literature was made prominent by the UNESCO report (1996) by the chapter titled Education: the necessary Utopia. The view expressed reflects the principles put forward by UNESCO of creating ‘hope for a world that is a better place to live in’ (Delors, 1996). The report suggests that education is at the heart of both individual and societal development.
...its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realise our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community. (Delors, 1996 p.17)

Ultimately, the report justified the use of Utopia as being a disruptor in the cynical cycle or giving up on the ideals of education and its critical role for the individual and society (Delors, 1996). Editors, Rychen and Salganik, would refer to the report as they set up the premise for the OECD's DeSeCo project.

Rychen and Salganik (2002) identified from the debates in the Second DeSeCo Symposium that the traditional view of what education is, is being challenged. Andrew Gonzci, University of Technology Sydney, discussed the impact of conventional Western beliefs on education as being what is taught,

―knowledge is thought of as discrete facts, beliefs, and ideas, that is, specifiable objects stored in the brain and used as appropriate, (Rychen & Salganik, 2002, p.122).

Gonzci identified that the converging new concepts of knowledge, neuroscience advances, development of cognitive sciences and learning theories, and a revival of philosophical arguments were the reasons the idea of education needed to change. He stated that educators had to challenge their beliefs on education (Rychen & Salganik, 2002).

**New Zealand rethinking the purpose of education**

When New Zealand reviewed its latest curriculum, Brewton argues that it gave the opportunity to ‘reconsider what it is that we think young people need to learn at school’ (Brewton, 2004b). Brewton explores the idea that ‘failure’ as a label is unfounded. If the person is a successful lifelong learner, they can learn in other situations and beyond
formal education. Brewerton suggests that, for a student to achieve this, they have to have a definite sense of self as a learner, resilience, be able to make effective decisions involving judgement and other cognitive competencies. Brewerton (2004a) further counsels for standards of achievement to shift from the assessment of learning to assessment for learning and suggests that although specified standards help people to unpack the detail, this can lead to losing sight of the bigger picture. Instead, according to Brewerton (2004b), learning is about breadth, not depth. Cornbleth defines both the ideals of the curriculum and the reality of what occurs in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2003).

*The curriculum encompasses all learning, both formal and informal, occurring in educational settings, including social values, attitudes and norms of behaviour as well as a body of knowledge. In practice, however, curriculum is commonly misconstrued as a plan for teaching, in which knowledge and procedures are isolated from the socio-cultural context of the school and classroom. (Cornbleth, 1990 p.4 as cited in Ministry of Education, 2003).*

**The Definition and Purpose of Key Competencies**

*From the origins of the DeSeCo project*

Firstly, ‘a competence is defined as the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context,’ (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). The definition is expanded on to state that not only the use of knowledge and cognitive and practical skills, but a competence includes the use of social and behaviour components: attitudes, emotions, values and motivation (Rychen & Salganik, 2002, 2003; Weinert, 2001).

The DeSeCo project identified three broad categories of key competencies described in Rychen and Salganik’s (2002, 2003) final papers on the project.

1. **Acting autonomously**, meaning individual identity, the ability to act and operate effectively in and on the world. Students to define who they are and fulfil their projects in a meaningful way. To take responsibility for their own lives and situate
their lives in a broader social context. Learning to learn, is being reflective and being able to evaluate themselves is part of this category.

2. **Using tools interactively,** requires being able to use tools that are relevant to meet every-day and professional demands by gathering, analysing and using knowledge, technologies and languages.

3. **Interacting in socially heterogeneous groups,** being able to relate well to others, from a different background. Using empathy to work within groups on common goals, can share leadership and support others together with managing and resolving conflicts.

The literature defined that these categories are interdependent and have an overarching umbrella of critical reflection (Rychen & Salynik, 2002, 2003). The proposition of key competencies is the ability of individuals to think for themselves, and take responsibility for their learning and actions (Rychen & Salganik, 2001, 2002). The authors of this report indicate the expectations for individuals to be adaptive, creative, innovative, self-directed and self-motivated to be successful in society. Key competencies involving combining cognitive and practical skills, creative abilities and personal attitudes, motivation and values are needed to enable young people to cope with today’s problems (Rychen & Salganik, 2002).

*From the origins of the New Zealand Curriculum*

From a New Zealand perspective, the literature states that the NZC framework was conceived from a process that started with a Curriculum Stocktake Report (2002) to the Minister of Education. The introduction of the report defines the ideals of curriculum and the reality of what occurs in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2003).

The report recommended that NZC be aligned more closely with Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum (1996). Te Whāriki does not separate knowledge, skills and attitudes as it is a dimension of holistic learning. The definitions of strands and goals are holistic and consistent with the recent understandings of competencies in the DeSeco report (Brewton, 2004a).
The previous curriculum documents (1992) used fifty-seven essential skills across the learning areas. It is suggested that they become five essential skills and attitudes that students apply for motivation and discernment to utilise these skills (Ministry of Education, 2003). The words 'essential skills' eventually got the label ‘competencies’ (Hipkins, 2006). The initial groupings from the stocktake report were: creative and innovative thinking; participation and contribution in communities; relating to others; reflecting on learning; developing self-knowledge; and making meaning from information (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Brewerton (2004b) defined competencies using the term capabilities, need to do something. She further stated competencies are to include the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values required to meet the demands of a task and are performance-based, manifested in actions including the internal thought processes of an individual in a particular context. Brewerton (2004a) added to this by suggesting key competencies are ‘needed by everyone across a variety of different life contexts to meet important demands and challenges.’ Competencies in other literature are considered to be integrated, holistic and complex (Rutherford, 2004) and draw on the definitions from the DeSeCo project (Hipkins, et al., 2014; Brewerton, 2004a). Finally, the definition of the NZC (2007) introduces the new concept of Key Competencies as capabilities for living and lifelong learning.

**NZC Five Key Competencies are named**

Karen Sewell, the then Secretary for Education in the foreword of the new curriculum document, The NZC (2007), explains that the curriculum is a framework designed so that all young people in New Zealand are equipped with the knowledge, competencies and values they will need in the 21st century to be successful citizens.
It defines five key competencies that are critical to sustained learning and effective participation in society and that underline the emphasis on lifelong learning... The New Zealand Curriculum is a clear statement of what we deem important in education. It takes as its starting point a vision of our young people as lifelong learners who are confidently and creative, connected, and actively involved. (MOE, 2007, p.4)

The five key competencies identified as:

1. Thinking
2. Using language, symbols, and texts
3. Managing self
4. Relating to others
5. Participating and contributing

The document then acknowledges that key competencies are more complex than skills, combining knowledge, attitudes and values that lead to action (MOE, 2007). Along with the new aspect of key competencies, the New Zealand Curriculum is to be seen as a framework (MOE, 2007), meaning that each school in New Zealand has the opportunity to design their curriculum based on the intent of this document and the aspirations of their communities (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; MOE, 2007). Karen Sewell concludes her introduction with an acknowledgement that the challenge was to continue to build on this framework (MOE, 2007) a theme that other literature would acknowledge as they reflected on whether key competencies had the impact on curriculum design (Hipkins, 2009; Hipkins & Boyd, 2011; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013).
Background to the origin of Key Competencies:

The depth and breadth of the DeSeCo project

Rychen and Salganik (1999) comment on the significance of the depth and rigour acquired from a diversity of scholars, interdisciplinary experts and institutions together with policymakers from around the world brought to the analysis, discussion and a consensus reached to secure a balance of conceptual, theoretical and practical outcomes. The literature stated that the project aim of individuals was being able to achieve their potential, have mutual respect for themselves and others, and to contribute to producing inclusive societies, that allowed for individual and collective goals. The premise for this project needed a framework of common values, with an informed and shared understanding that was about the importance and democratic values and achieving sustainable development (Rychen & Salganik, 1999).

In the final summary report of the project the authors acknowledge the challenge implementing the theory of key competencies into education identifying that it is a new field, with multiple and varied definitions and understandings depending on those contributors’ perspectives and ideology viewpoints added to the complexity of the process (Rychen & Salganik, 2002; 2003). The process is documented in the OECD (2001) background paper commencing from 1997 until 2002, the release of the final report. The significance of knowing the origins and depth of the DeSeCo project highlights the forewarning of issues that would later be acknowledged in other literature of the diluted understanding of the meaning of key competencies, their categories and the role they had in the new direction of education.
The sequence of events (Fig, 1) illustrates the different types of research conducted, the variety in experts and stakeholders including different countries, of which New Zealand is identified (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). New Zealand’s key competencies were based on this DeSeCo project (Brewerton, 2004a; Hipkins et al., 2014). The complexity and depth
of the discussion and analysing completed over the years by experts would later be the challenge as to how this information was transmitted in the NZC and to schools (Hipkins et al., 2014).

Defining Curriculum

The curriculum is defined by Carr, McGee, Jones, McKinley, Bell, Barr, and Simpson (2005) as a ‘cascade’ of interpreted curricula. They imply that the various levels of the implementation flow down from the official curriculum and the policymakers writing the curriculum, to how a school leadership and governance interpret the implementation of this curriculum, to the teacher's decisions on delivery of the content to their students. And finally, how the students interpret their understanding of teaching and learning activities: the actual curriculum (Burgon et al., 2012; Harland, 1988; MOE, 2003). Curricula encapsulate all of these levels of interpretation and delivery. In other literature, the implication is what is transmitted, valued and deemed significant direct the teaching and learning which impacts the student (Claxton, 2008; Johnson, 2014; Robinson, 2015).

The potential of key competencies

For students to prepare them for their future

The Weinert (1999) report, as part of international studies investigated by the DeSeCo programme, suggested that the purpose of competencies in education was about the course of individual development in the primary educational setting and for students to acquire the necessary competencies to prepare them for their future social and professional lives.

What competencies are relevant for individuals to lead an overall successful and responsible life and for society to face the challenge of the present and future needs. (Rychen & Salganik, 2002 p.106)
New Zealand’s key competencies were based on the DeSeCo report (Brewton, 2004a). Rychen and Salganik (2002) argued that throughout the world, societies have realised that they are facing significant challenges of rapid social and technological changes. They also outline that these are highlighted by globalisation, growing diversity, inequalities of opportunities, increased poverty and environmental threats. Within these complex, interdependent world issues, education is identified by the authors as a critical investment both for the individual and society. The problem is that the curriculum based on subject-related knowledge and skills does not provide the relevant outcomes needed for a successful life and a well-functioning society (Rychen & Salganik, 2002).

Brewerton (2004a) proposes a more thorough understanding of key competencies to enable students to know what they are learning, and prepare them for their future. She warned that this did not mean a more significant number of discrete achievements or standards; the intention was for a more holistic approach that links to overarching competencies.

*Equity for all in education*

Ruth Dreifuss (2002), Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs, in her opening address to the second DeSeCo symposium, held in February 2002, identified the possibilities of competencies ensuring equality of opportunities which allows people to achieve a personal quality of life which benefits society. The second symposium was convened to debate, explore and reflect the shared understanding of the framework that defined, selected and assessed key competencies (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). Dreifuss espoused that key competencies have the purpose of ensuring equality of opportunity and therefore contribute to the actual achievement of human rights. She requested that the symposium was to consider minority cultures or deprived sectors of society to be given serious consideration when implementing key competencies and education policy (Rychen & Salganik, 2002; 2003). In the final DeSeCo report, the big picture of competencies was to remain broad allowing for nations, communities and individuals to apply their cultural preferences and values to them (Rychen & Salganik, 2002).
New Zealand literature qualifies equity issues are addressed if key competencies provide a more cohesive curriculum (Hipkins, 2009). The individual within the concept of competencies is encouraged to seek to understand themselves about their identities, aspirations and connection with how they see the world. Brewerton discusses the implication of key competencies as being identified against every culture, as anthropologist Jack Goody questioned in his contribution to DeSeCo. The concern for New Zealand was that recognition and support of cultural differences as valued and expressed by Māori and Pasifika communities are central to the well-being and responsibilities of New Zealand as a whole (Brewton 2004a).

Reid (2006) argues that if the status quo remains, then there is a risk that hierarchies (subjects, traditional methods of teaching and learning, teacher and student relationships and assessment) continue, ensuring that some students stay marginalised as they have no access to areas of a broader education. Robinson (2015) writes about the success of those who do well in the current system comes at a high price for many who do not. In the paper, Supporting Future-Orientated Learning and Teaching (2012), it was identified that equity is no longer about being the ‘same’, but about having the opportunity to determine their particular ways of being (Bolstad et al., 2012).

Transformative

Hipkins (2014) in her book, Key Competencies for the Future, states key competencies as a powerful metaphor for change. NZC has introduced the competencies so that young people are supported to strengthen their capabilities for life now and in their future. Identifying the importance of key competencies in the curriculum has been a start, but the real potential is their vital role in ongoing changes to New Zealand education,

‘The key competencies are a potentially transformative feature of the New Zealand Curriculum.’ (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013 p.1)
Having identified the vision for education as the following; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are to be realigned including cultural and society needs and student-centred learning informed decisions. The use of latest research from neuroscience, cognitive sciences, development of learning theories and renewed interest in philosophical arguments will ensure theory and practice are relevant and connected (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins, 2009; Rychen & Salganik, 2003). Informed practice in the purpose of key competencies opens up space for possibilities that lead to improvements in traditional teaching and learning (Hipkins & Boyd, 2011).

The literature from researched papers from NZCER on key competencies in the NZC question to what extent key competencies have transformed the curriculum. These papers have continued to present the case that competencies are a potentially transformative feature of the curriculum, a stimulus to address the how and why of learning (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Hipkins, 2009; Bolstad et al., 2012; Burgon et al., 2012).

Recently, Hipkins (2017) in a paper presented to the Third European Curriculum reiterates that key competencies should change learning in non-trivial ways and that their key role is to reframe the enacted curriculum to enable future-focused aims of the essence statements. Hipkins continues to state that key competencies are intended to change the curriculum and not to be assimilated on top of what is already being taught.

The issue of whether key competencies have had the expected impact on teaching and learning is discussed in the next section. The challenges and problems are examined by identifying common themes from the literature.

**The issues of implementing key competencies**

**The complexity of key competencies**

Hipkins and McDowell (2013) suggest that the NZC created a problem when it named and gave its perspective on key competencies. They add that these two aspects did not convey the richness of each competency; some of them were only a subset of the OECD’s
competencies. Hipkins and McDowell discuss the reality that because of the complexity, each competency consists of many layers requiring a long time to build a deep understanding of the role of key competencies. This role of being the catalyst for changing pedagogy and redefining learning.

Lost in Translation
This literature review provides a broad picture of the process that went into the OECD’s DeSeCo project, to highlight the rigour and complexity brought to produce the key competencies categories. The literature suggests that even the change of names from the original concepts may have weakened the description and understanding of the competencies (Hipkins et al., 2014). Other pieces of literature written on competencies identify that the different interpretations due to their complexity have occurred, a change in pedagogy approach is required to implement them, and a discussion on what is truly valued, (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & Boyd, 2011) has therefore seen two ways to implement them into the curriculum. They have either been drilled down to checklists, using them to promote achievement outcomes, e.g. managing self is about the organisation, being prepared for learning with sharpened pencils. The other way through the lens of personal development is the idea of autonomy, self-agency, self-regulation, knowing and finding their potential (Claxton, 2011; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Reid, 2006; Robinson, 2015). The result is that instead of being a dissonance the competencies have been assimilated into the curriculum (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013) and therefore the purpose and the value of them to students has been 'lost in translation’ (Johnson, 2015). Reid (2006), called this 'name and hope’, the compliance way of implementing competencies.

The vision and value of education
The authors of the DeSeCo project highlighted the discussion of several contributors acknowledging a challenge of valuing the key competencies depended on ethical and value judgements depending on the different perspectives and ideological viewpoints. Rychen and Salaynik’s report discussed the tension of implementing key competencies.
The concern of key competencies becoming too specific or fragmented leading to reductionist competency-based education and ultimately to nothing more than a list of specific unrelated tasks (Rychen & Salaynik 2001; 2002). If curriculum reform is a dynamic and iterative process with complexity at the various levels that make up the curriculum (MOE, 2003) how will the curriculum be defined in a way that fulfils a vision of education for young people? (Hipkins, 2006; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Robinson, 2015).

The discussion on the value of the traditional education model is challenged, not only by key competencies but by new approaches to learning, the growth of cross-disciplinary teaching, problem-based learning and project work (Rychen & Salaynik, 2001, 2002). Sir Ken Robinson has spoken and written extensively on the issue of the heritage of the industrial model of education, and the entrenched hierarchy of subjects and knowledge that continue to distract and to inhibit the revolution that is required in education (Robinson, 2006, 2009, 2015). He calls for radical change in how we think about and 'do school', one based on entirely different principles and practices, 'change the story, change the metaphor,' (Robinson, 2015).

Ongoing and reflective effort

The DeSeCo editors, Rychen and Salynik (2002), stated that there was no one model, neither a discrete universal list of specific competencies as the nature of learning is always evolving and iterative. It is to take a combination of theoretical, empirical approaches as well as academic, policy and practice to implement the key competencies successfully. The literature agrees that for change or reform to occur a continuous effort is required (Rychen & Salaynik, 2001, 2002; Reid, 2006; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013).

Hipkins (2006) forewarned in her discussion paper to the MOE that the overloaded curriculum is needing a profound refocusing of the curriculum priorities. Later, in 2009 Hipkins continued to espouse a refocusing on curriculum priorities, to move away from hierarchical content, the traditional view of knowledge attainment in the main subjects that dominate the purpose of learning. Serious debate on curriculum content reduction and what was the nature of knowledge has to occur through ongoing professional
conversations (Hipkins, 2009). The enormity of reforming concepts, curriculum and knowledge, cannot be underestimated or devalued if key competencies have the potential of being a catalyst for ‘a richly productive, future-focused curriculum innovation’ (Hipkins, 2009 p.72).

The literature on key competencies since their inception continues to uphold the purpose of education and the direction of the curriculum needs sustained consideration to see the changes that need to happen to address the industrial, heritage model of education honestly (Claxton, Chambers, Powell & Lucas, 2011; Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Robinson, 2015).

Impacts on teachers

Andrew Gonzoi (2002) addressed the issues and challenges teachers face when implementing key competencies. He implied that a paradigm shift is essential to rethink the purpose of teaching and learning. He outlined that teachers tend to teach subjects and not children, and teachers attitudes and capabilities hinder the process. Gonzoi discussed the subject of competencies and how these are reduced down to thoughtless, assimilated tasks. Gonzoi (2002) suggests that the tension between a meaningful overall model of competencies and that of identifying their components can become a list of indicators, requires careful consideration. The literature on implementing key competencies to the NZC has agreed with Gonzoi’s concern of how they will impact and be implemented by teachers (Hipkins & Boyd, 2011; Rutherford, 2004).

Key competencies from acting as agents of change

The way in which they (key competencies) are understood and implemented in schools points to tensions and challenges that may prevent them from acting as agents of curriculum change. (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013 p.1)

The intention of bringing key competencies to the forefront of the curriculum, to transform the curriculum has been underestimated both in New Zealand and internationally (Bolstad
et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; Reid, 2006; Robinson, 2015). The challenge of implementing the concept of key competencies has been widely documented in research papers from NZCER and other international governments, reinforcing the tensions noted from the DeSeCo report. The themes include the interpretation of the key competencies and their concept, change in the purpose of education, a different approach to teaching and learning including using current theories on learning and practice. The understanding of teacher and student both play a part in teaching and learning: student-centred learning. (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; Reid, 2006, Robinson, 2015, Rychen & Salganik, 2001, 2002).

**Change of direction in New Zealand**

New Zealand introduced National Standards in 2010 (MOE, 2010) and these were designed to work alongside the NZC, but as time went on, they began to lead the direction of many schools, causing a narrowing of the curriculum and a focus on assessment for the three areas of writing, reading and mathematics (Bonne, 2016). In Bonne’s (2016) paper on National Standards in their seventh year two thirds of teachers reported a narrowing of the curriculum, 54% of Principals reported that National Standards drives what the school does, 40% stated the focus on the reading, writing and mathematics had taken away from other aspects of the curriculum.

The literature asks, ‘What is assessed is what is valued by schools and community?’ (Carr & Claxton, 2002). The back to basics of the writing, reading and mathematics agenda puts hard data at the forefront of the curriculum (Robinson, 2015). The reality of constant reforms and emphasis on standardised education has distracted ongoing professional learning around competencies (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; Reid, 2006; Robinson, 2015).

During this research project the change in New Zealand Government in late 2017 has already seen a significant policy change being announced... ‘to replace National Standards and Ngā Whanaketanga Rūmaki Māori with a new system that better
acknowledges a child’s progress, and focuses more on developing key competencies for all learners,’ (Ministry of Education, 2017 n.d). Further research will identify the significance of this announcement and how it impacts New Zealand education.

**Identifying the connection between theory and practice**

Literature from the second symposium of the DeSeCo project acknowledges that the nature and complexity of key competencies require educators to have a deep understanding of the concept of key competency. That the theme of practice and theory should never lose sight of each other is presented as a finding from the DeSeCo project (Rychen & Salganik, 2001, 2002).

Rychen and Salganik (2002) stated that a top-down (policy driven), bottom-up (teacher practice) approach is required, this was also asking teachers to be involved in research and for practitioners to be accepted as real-world experts. Hipkins (2009) suggests that the move towards student-centred learning requires a focus on the professional practitioner to make decisions regarding the context of the planned curriculum in an evolving, responsive cycle. She also argues that the current philosophical arguments of the nature and enactment of what is the purpose of education, knowledge and curriculum will for many educators be new to them. Time and opportunities to learn, research and debate will be critical to support teachers to shift and sustain practice (Hipkins, 2009; Reid, 2006; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007).

**Teacher Practice**

Teachers cannot be expected to change practice until they understand and own the compelling reasons why teaching and learning have to change (Hipkins, 2009). Hipkins and McDowell’s (2013) paper from NZCER, went further and argued that teachers who could not understand the role key competencies played in curriculum change needed to have access to challenging, sustained professional learning opportunities, including convincing exemplars of what it looks like, the teaching and learning. The focus is to be on students’ present and future needs and thinking around the purposes of learning, a
bigger picture of what the aim of education is. The literature implies having a rigorous discussion on the vision for education for New Zealanders is key to these changes (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins, 2009; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013) and connecting back to findings both from the DeSeCo and UNESCO commissioned reports (Delors, 1996; Rychen & Salganik, 2001, 2003).

The literature suggests having identified that the vision for education curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are to be realigned including cultural needs, society needs and student-centred learning informed decisions. Hipkins (2006) identified the sociocultural theory that underpinned the key competencies framework. This approach will have implications for the delivery of key competencies being at the heart of the curriculum. The theory places contexts and relationships as essential aspects of learning. It identifies the teacher relating their pedagogy of moral and ethical competencies as opposed to traditional technical processes of teaching and learning (Brewton 2004a; Hipkins, 2006; Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

Further to this the literature imposes that the use of the latest research from neuroscience, cognitive sciences, development of learning theories and renewed interest in philosophical arguments will ensure theory and practice are relevant and connected (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins, 2009; Rychen & Salganik 2003). Informed practice in the purpose of key competencies opens up space for possibilities that lead to improvements in traditional teaching and learning (Hipkins & Boyd, 2011).

**Research into identifying the gap between theory and practice**

*Time, experience and theory is needed*

The call is for rigorous and sustained professional development alongside examples of how to transform the curriculum (Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Bolstad et al., 2012). The warnings are clear on not having sustained professional discourse and systemic development, providing resources and learning opportunities will take the attention away
from the potential transformative outcomes. Instead, they may become contrite, and assimilation will occur (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; Robinson, 2015). Hipkins and McDowell (2013), through their experiences, agree that considerable time is needed to realise the full potential of key competencies to transform teaching and learning.

Claxton (2011) suggests that the competencies need to be a journey of exploration. Hipkins and McDowell (2013) agree that with time and the right focus the understanding of them will evolve and become more cohesive. Reid (2006) has concerns about the systems used to bring key competencies into practice, as all of this takes time and space. The early research reinforced this as early adopters initially included key competencies in their curriculum visions and used these as better ways of teaching traditionally, but the progress was slow and often stopped once the initial enthusiasm waned (Cowie, Hipkins, Keown & Boyd, 2011). As teachers grow in their expertise of comprehension and implementing the deeper layers of key competencies, then this tacit knowledge needs to be relayed to others to support the transmission of effective practice. Then this allows system-wide shifts in the delivery of competencies (Bolstad et al., 2012). To consider students’ current and future learning needs and to think about the connections between immediate and long-term outcomes of learning productive researcher and practitioner partnerships have to occur (Bolstad et al., 2012; Hipkins & McDowell, 2013).

Identifying transformative practice

Hipkins and Boyd (2011) along with Bolstad et al., (2012) emphasise that the process from theory to practice, then practice to theory takes time and space and identify this as being the recursive elaboration. Bolstad et al., (2012) continues to imply that the result of his process will result in schools and practitioners asking, “where to next” (p.61).

In Bolstad’s et al., (2012) report on supporting future-oriented learning and teaching: A New Zealand perspective, a table was used to demonstrate the differences between shallow or simple versus deep or complex. The former is considered to prevent a transformation (Leadbeater, 2006). Although this table was based on personalised learning, these same areas are mentioned in Hipkins and Boyd’s (2011) paper on the
recursive elaboration of key competencies as agents of curriculum change. Figure 3 identifies the indicators of the deep expressions of practice, bringing the best of theory and practice together – the ‘where to next’ opens up opportunities for transformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deep expressions of practice</th>
<th>Shallow expressions of practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ideas about learners and learning have usually been developed and reflected on critically</td>
<td>• Schools are captured by “fads”, picking up lifelong learning ideas and jargon from educational</td>
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<td>over several years within a school (or professional learning network).</td>
<td>“gurus”.</td>
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<td>• Schools may seek ideas from educational specialists, or develop their own language and</td>
<td>• Teachers and school leaders may think and talk extensively about what these ideas and words</td>
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<td>concepts to talk about learning, but these are integrated into the school’s “big picture”</td>
<td>mean for learning, but strategies for developing students’ learning capacities can become</td>
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<td>about the purposes for learning. There is a coherence across the various ideas that are</td>
<td>simply more “things for students to learn”.</td>
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<td>picked up and integrated into the schools’ learning vision.</td>
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<td>• Learners have genuine input into shaping what happens in their learning; not only how they</td>
<td>• Students are socialised into using terms, practices and approaches that are designed to</td>
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<td>learn, but also what sorts of learning activities happen in their class/school.</td>
<td>support them to become “lifelong learners”, but don’t actually have any role in shaping these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learners (not just teachers) believe that students have input into how things happen in</td>
<td>practices nor the ability to critique or challenge them; their engagement with the words and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their classrooms and school.</td>
<td>practices is shallow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learners can link their school learning to other aspects of their lives, or see connections</td>
<td>• Learners don’t carry these ideas, practices and language into other aspects of their lives,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with their goals or aspirations for their lives beyond school.</td>
<td>because they aren’t connected to or shaped by the students’ interests and life contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The curriculum is not a predetermined set of content to be learned. Rather, the learning</td>
<td>• The words and practices can become a tool for socialising students into “correct” behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities students undertake are shaped to connect with, extend and challenge students’</td>
<td>(e.g., to encourage students to be more resourceful and/or self-managing) but the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interests, bringing them into relationship with curriculum knowledge. Students develop and</td>
<td>itself does not change—learners are still expected to learn the curriculum content decided by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use knowledge working on learning activities that are meaningful to them (see</td>
<td>teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Bolstad et al., 2012, p.20</td>
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</table>
Further research needed
NZCER has been researching and writing papers on key competencies since before they were introduced to the NZC. Rosemary Hipkins has led many of these research projects and is now leading the development of an overview of competencies in NZC. In her book (2014) she continues to ask for partnerships between researchers and teachers to continue to move further into “largely uncharted waters” (p.93).

This research project is intended to add to the literature on ‘where to next?’ To hear from experienced teachers that are using deep expressions of practice as they transform their teaching and learning by the impact of key competencies.

Summary
This literature review outlined the complex journey that policymakers, academics, researchers, educators, communities and students are taking to begin to answer what is needed for our young people to live successful lives and become active participants in society. The nature of reform relies on the evolving and reflective practice of all those partnerships.

The literature review identified tensions and opportunities for teaching and learning when implementing the NZC key competencies. How teachers navigate these will be examined in this thesis and add to the story of key competencies transforming education.

Innovation is strategic when it has significance beyond its immediate context - when it inspires others to innovate in similar ways in their own situation. (Robinson, 2015, p.234)
Chapter Three: The Research Approach

Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale applied to the design of this research project, the methods, and the analysis approach and identifies the ethical issues relating to the research. The research is based on a qualitative paradigm and draws on a practitioner research approach. The approach encompasses a critical theory philosophy, and the methods follow a narrative inquiry that draws on practitioner life stories. This research relates to principles and values of Kaupapa Maori and is influenced by the ideas expressed in a Talanoa approach: it is seen as a conversation, a sharing of ideas, and the creation of a relationship. This inquiry seeks to uncover participants’ lived experiences as educators and how competencies have made an impact on their teaching. The personal accounts involve encounters where participants retell and relive the issues surrounding the topic in question and provide insight into their realities, and aspirations allow for authentic information to be gathered (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Goodson, 2003; Smithers, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006). By providing for the telling and reliving of stories using emotions, knowledge and experience, the project will provide an opportunity for a rich contextual transfer of in-depth knowledge that may lead to critical discussions and new synergised ideas and themes (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Goodson, 2003; Vaioleti, 2006).

Similarly, as a New Zealander completing a research project in New Zealand, it is essential to accept and acknowledge the values and the intentions of Kaupapa Maori. The principles and values within a Kaupapa Maori context inform this project regarding interaction, reciprocity and Whanaungatanga; to build continued relations of respect, connectedness and engagement (Pipi, Cram, Hawke, Hawke, Huriwai, Matakiterangi, Milne, Morgan & Tuhaka & Tuuta, 2004).
The structure of the chapter is as follows:

- Outline of the qualitative paradigm using a critical theory approach
- Examination of critical practitioner research and narrative inquiry through lived stories
- Description of the methods for data collection and analysis
- Validity and trustworthiness is examined, and ethical considerations are discussed to conclude the chapter

**Qualitative paradigm**

This research takes a qualitative stance, supporting the aim of the project to examine the lived reality of teachers by engaging with their stories of using competencies to lead their teaching and learning. By taking a qualitative approach, the research gathers rich descriptions of the phenomenon of interest (Mutch, 2013). Qualitative researchers are guided by abstract principles combined with beliefs that guide the research lenses, paradigm, or interpretive framework. Ontology (what is the nature of reality?), epistemology (what is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?) and methodology (how do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?) underpin the research paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The researcher’s ontological and epistemological set of beliefs guides their thinking and action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

**Critical theory**

The critical theory identifies issues of power and justice in areas such as education and identifies the alignment of social institutions and cultural dynamics that interconnect to create a social system. Critical theory challenges the status quo that is often protected by privileged groups who have an interest in preserving their advantages (Kincheloe, 2007; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003; Robinson, 2015). The approach is “a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves.” (Neuman, 2011, p.74)
Connection between critical theory and this study

The intent of gathering tacit knowledge from experienced teachers to investigate the impact of key competencies on their practice comes from a holistic purpose of education to challenge the current mainstream view of curriculum. The participants and researcher are teachers aiming to teach a curriculum that meets the needs of all students and look beyond the narrow academic view (Bonne, 2016) of some communities, educators and policymakers. It is this stance that aligns with Freire’s (1968) view that teaching and learning are non-neutral, political and ethical processes. To have a narrow view of teaching based on skills and technical methods negates the importance of seeing education in a broader sense of human beings and the world. Freire continues to promote the ideology that teaching is about the process of formation, for creating human beings (Carpenter et al., 2008; Freire, 1972; Leonard & McLaren, 1993).

Freire espouses a view that the voices of the individuals and their identities as active, cultural agents of social change requires that the personal and collective stories be valued and not depoliticised to the level of unworthy consideration (Freire, 1972; Carpenter et al., 2008; Leonard & McLaren, 1993). This view reflects the approach of this study to collect stories of teachers, valuing their experiences, reflective practice as valid evidence to be thoughtfully considered and listened to. The hope of Utopian possibilities and practices lead to liberating pedagogy: “that is, the Praxis required for people to become active participants in shaping the economic, social, cultural and subjective formation that affect their lives and the lives of others.” (Leonard & McLaren,1993 p. xii)

Critical practitioner research: teacher as researcher

This project takes a critical research approach, gathering theory and practice that can promote reform and sustainability (Robinson, 2014). Critical research can improve educational practice, curricula and systems. It allows for questions on what is taught, how it is taught and what the broader goals of education should be. (Giroux, 1997). Giroux (1997) implies that teachers are in danger of being passive followers, regardless of the ethical issues that are at stake. The teacher as researcher has an obligation of naming and changing social situations to benefit everyone, by becoming an active producer of
meaning and not a bystander (Goodson, 2003; Kincheloe, 2003, 2008; Robinson, 2015). The hope is for this research project to be part of a growing group of teachers inspiring change and enabling a continued conversation on the rethinking of the purpose of education to benefit all children.

This research is about improving the opportunities for students in schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kincheloe, 2003). The restlessness and dissonance of wanting to change the status quo provide a stimulus for creative, inquiring research that is driven by motivated teachers. Transformative teachers use the experience of their students, culture and current modes of thinking and ideology to help students and communities make sense of the world which surrounds them (Kincheloe, 2003).

**The view of research as praxis**

As a novice critical researcher, I will continue throughout the process to develop an understanding of the project and may imply specific purposes, political positions, and pedagogy between participants (Kincheloe, 2003). The benefits of being a teacher/researcher can reinforce good teaching by interpreting the significance of ideas and theories on people: the observer can watch the educational phenomenon from within and acknowledge the connections to other groups outside of education (Kincheloe, 2003; Kincheloe, Steinberg & Hinchey, 1999).

This research enables the teacher to inquire into their practice, question their assumptions, and contextualise their situation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986., Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). The truth of research is evident in practice (Kincheloe, 2003) and allowing the participants to reflect on their journeys as to how key competencies have impacted on their practice is often local and therefore invisible beyond its immediate participants. Those participants involved are frequently the ones that teach differently, that are advocates for their students, and will question the status quo by reflecting on existing practice. These practitioners will often use inquiry into their practice, applying theory to try to make sense of their questions and thinking. Practitioner researchers are willing to question the fundamentals of teaching, learning and schooling and challenge the
decision makers by validating their inquiries through the connection to practice and relating it theoretically (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Carpenter et al., 2008; Shor, 1993).

While historically teachers as researchers have not been valued (Kincheloe, 2003), there has been a resurgence of practitioner research to question the ‘top-down’ approach which has often led to technical driven practice that has not been critically grounded (Kincheloe, 2003; Reid, 2006; Rychen & Salganik, 2003; Robinson, 2015). The critical researchers began to search for more appropriate methods of researching, to capture the world of education: one of these methods is to document life stories of teachers to include their personal views (Kincheloe, 2003). For any long-term solutions of reforms surely the need to listen to those who are the closest to the day-to-day interaction with students would be where you start. (Carpenter et al., 2009; Robinson, 2015).

**Narrative inquiry through lived stories**

The researcher has chosen a narrative inquiry approach; collecting teacher stories of their lived experiences. By using relational, critical theory and qualitative methodology as a background the stories drawn from the experiences of educators and the students with whom they engage, can provide an insight into the possibilities for growth and change in practice (Clandinin & Pushor, 2009). Narrative inquiry allows for complexity and extensive details to be gathered and facilitates a broader understanding. It gives the researcher the opportunity to gather rich descriptions of the phenomenon. The inquiry method can highlight ethical matters and help form new theoretical understandings of people’s experiences. This approach follows a recursive and reflexive process of moving from stories (practice) to theory (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; DePoy & Gitlin, 2015).

The practitioner researcher becomes part of the story by returning to the aims of the project, where both participants and researchers’ lived experiences reflect shifts in thinking and create new meanings within the profession. The outcomes of this research can then allow other practitioners the prospects of how they may work in their unique
situations by bringing their own experiences and imagination to these stories (Clandinin & Pushor, 2009; Craig, 2003; McNiff, 2007).

**Lived stories**

The telling of teacher’s lives and stories provides an opportunity for insights into the on-the-ground experience of educational changes. Teachers are presenting personal and practical insights which allow other practitioners to gain insights into their practices. These narratives benefit both the practitioners involved and the project, having the potential for advancing educational research because stories of action within theories of context (Kincheloe, 2003; Smithers, 2016). The concern is teachers making changes in their classrooms and schools are too remote from the 'top-down' approach to influence, question or challenge the theory, structure or ideology that is needed to lead curriculum reform. These lived experiences need to be part of a bigger picture, beyond their immediate situation (Goodson, 2003; Robinson, 2015).

*In this sense, life history studies of their nature insist that understanding teacher agency is a vital part of educational research and one that we ignore at our peril.* (Goodson, 2003 p.57)

Narrative approaches allow for the transferring of tacit knowledge. This knowledge is shaped through their interpretation of personal experiences, defining their choices and decisions; their expertise developed as a result of reflective practice. Tacit knowledge can be articulated and made explicit (Puusa & Eerikalen, 2010; Smithers, 2016). Therefore, the purpose of telling stories is to allow participants to decide their perspective on the events. Having hindsight on these experiences can bring new understandings as to what was important to them, and how contemporary changes can impact practice. The participant's stories are their representation and interpretation of how they analysed the implications of their practice (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Finally, how teachers’ personal beliefs and missions relate to new pedagogies and reforms have to be considered in this process: ignore teachers, at a high cost of failures to new initiatives and policies (Goodson, 2003).
Methods of data collection

The Selection of Participants

The method of gathering stories using purposive sampling of participants according to preselected criteria relevant to this research question (Mutch, 2013) was employed. The participants were required to be experienced teachers (having taught for at least six years) and to have developed an understanding of competencies to impact their teaching and learning. The criteria used to select the teachers is based on Leadbeater's (2006) definition of deep understanding of a concept. The criteria include that the schools they teach within have developed their language and concepts of competencies, these have integrated into the ‘big picture’ about the purpose of learning and acknowledge that the learning areas of the New Zealand Curriculum support the journey not lead it. The participants will have the view of “where to next?” (Bolstad et al., 2012). The researcher will approach potential participants identified as being engaged with and using the competencies and will invite them to be part of the research.

The researcher approached four schools that fitted the criteria through email and initial meetings. If teachers expressed an interest in the project they were directly contacted and given a document explaining the researcher's interest and outlining the purpose of the research and the list of questions that would be used to guide the semi-structured interview. The importance of getting a diverse sampling of experienced practitioners will benefit both the trustworthiness and outcome of the research project and the findings (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Smithers, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006).

All participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet. The selection was based on ensuring that a broad range of curriculum levels was covered. The participants were given the questions to allow them time if appropriate to consider the content and to ask if they wanted to have input into the process.
Overview of Participants

Seven participants were interviewed, three of the teachers had previously taught at the same school as the researcher, four were unknown to the researcher and came from three other schools.

Overview of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Teacher Role</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Junior Teacher</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Intermediate Teacher</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Team Leader Years 7-10</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Junior Teacher</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher F</td>
<td>Junior Teacher</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher G</td>
<td>Middle School Teacher</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Life stories using a semi-structured interview

Data gathering involved the use of semi-structured interviews. The data included narratives based on a particular topic from seven participants. In particular, participants were invited to provide stories of their experience that included education practice involving key competencies under questions of how competencies impacted on their teaching, the potential of key competencies to lead teaching and learning and finally to explore the tensions and challenges faced when leading with key competencies. Using broad questions in an open interview can lead to narrative responses, although similar to a semi-structured interview that provides flexibility to detour from the planned course of action and follow a line of interest in order to gather the rich data that results in a narrative approach. The researcher needs to allow the participants to have more freedom as to the pathways they take retelling their experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Goodson, 2003; Mutch, 2013; Smithers, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006).
The researcher’s role during the discussions is to use active listening skills, probing to ensure clarity of the narrative (Galletta, 2013; Webb, Burgin, & Maheshwari, 2009) the challenge being to not give an opinion to the responses. In this study the researcher encourages the practitioners to explore their ideas, personal thoughts and behaviour. The use of their language will help to orientate and provide an understanding of the culture and beliefs of the practitioner (Webb, 2006; Galletta, 2013; Goodson, 2003). The retrospective nature of life stories enables the practitioner to make significant reflections on the events or experiences, to examine them against their view of the world (Carpenter et al., 2008; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Goodson, 2003). This approach allows for the research project to hear personal views and experiences rather than the mechanics of the teaching practice (Freire, 1972; Goodson, 2003).

**Gathering stories**

The first section of the interview was designed to explore the background as to why they became teachers, and why they remain in the profession. Participants shared their views on the purpose of education and what it was like teaching in the current education system to give a context to their situation in New Zealand. The second section invited participants to describe their understanding of and their experiences of using competencies in their practice. They were asked to identify critical points in their journey and to identify tensions and challenges of teaching when leading with key competencies. The final section of the interview asked participants to look forward to their perception of what is next for them personally and professionally.

A paid transcriber transcribed the sessions. Transcripts were provided to the participants to allow them to check for accuracy and to provide them with an opportunity to clarify any points or add further information. Participants could also remove from the research any part of the transcript they chose. The nature of the data collection method meant that the language was informal and conversational and often meant that the participants would refine their thinking in the telling of their stories. All participants chose to edit parts of their transcript to help clarify their meaning. The questions and any comments made by the
researcher were deleted, as to not take away from the participant's account (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Goodson, 2003).

**Focus group**
Following the interviews and the review of the transcript, a focus group was undertaken. A focus group is an opportunity for participants to collaborate on the emerging ideas and for the researcher to seek more information on findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The participants were the same as those who took part in the recording of their lived stories, to provide critical discussions on the emerging themes, allowing for new synergised ideas. Using the narrative and Talaona approach allows for reciprocity into the analysing of the initial findings, gain further insights and for their interpretations which may lead to an energising and uplifting of connectedness and shared aspirations (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Goodson, 2003; Vaioleti, 2006).

**The Process**
All participants were invited to be part of the focus group. Of the seven participants who took part in the interviews, three took part in the focus group. The reality of the time of year, being late December would mean that only three participants would take part in this session held at a neutral setting. The initial themes emerging from the teacher stories; key ideas that are needed to support teachers and schools to lead with key competencies, the potential for students, and the connection between theory and practice were provided to the focus group before and then discussed. The researcher made notes and an audio recording of the session.

**Analysis**
The complex task of interpreting data as a critical researcher combines aspects of understanding of self, conscious-raising, and ethical awareness. The bigger picture of the 'greater good' connected to the outside of self and self-interest (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000; Kincheloe, Steinberg & Hinchley, 1999) acknowledging this as being a view that
this researcher has taken. The vastness of material collected during the interviews and focus group relies on categorising after the data had been thematically analysed (Mutch, 2013). The themes will be organised under the headings based on the research questions on the impact of the New Zealand Curriculum competencies on their practice, the potential for teaching and learning if competencies are at the forefront and the tensions and challenges of placing competencies at the forefront of teaching and learning.

Narrative research relies on the interpretation of the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher needs to possess the knowledge and insights required to produce trustworthy results (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). A combination of two approaches will be used to get depth and richness from the stories, using narrative and thematic analysis approaches, using thematic analysis to generate themes, by going backwards and forwards in a reflexive approach (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

A narrative analysis aims to understand how people think through events over time and in context. It looks at the sense of the story, whether it is logical, whether it identifies events and their consequences, whether it evaluates, and whether there is evidence of transformation (Bold, 2012).

A thematic analysis focuses on the content of the narratives, the events that occur, the experiences that people have and the meanings that emerge through finding a set of themes within the data (Bold, 2012). The emerging themes, key concepts, common words, and areas of interest begin to form in the initial browse. The continued refining was undertaken throughout the data collection and analysis phase as the text was coded and grouped to look for comparisons and main findings under the questions of the research project. Identified themes were also considered concerning the relevant literature (Mutch, 2013).

These two approaches sit alongside the interpretation of hermeneutics; seeing between the whole and parts; the continuous circle moving from abstract to concrete, whole to part, and general to specific as the data is analysed (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).
Validity and trustworthiness

The traditional understanding of internal and external validity is to the detriment of this project, the view to achieving validation by establishing a clear boundary between the researcher and the researched results would impede the understanding and insights of this project and is a contradiction to the practitioner research stance. Kincheloe (2003) argues that to pursue ideas a closeness between the participant and the researcher needs to be cultivated to explore the interpretation (etymology) of the phenomenon by using the researcher's subjectivity and intuitions. The view of the researcher is that trustworthiness is more important than validity for qualitative research of this kind, therefore seven purposive participants were considered acceptable for this research.

To trust the quality of the findings in an inquiry carried out by a critical researcher engaged in practitioner-based research requires a different view of validity. The use of lived experiences grounded and shaped by the project and aligned with theory becomes known as applied practice. The awareness of the relationships between the process of finding meaning, research findings and the everyday experiences of teachers creates a new sense of validation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness and transparency

The trustworthiness of the research is assured by identifying and attending to the various forms of interactions connecting the researcher, the researched, data, contexts and the situated. The researcher needs to possess knowledge of the issues to produce quality insights and understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). In this study, the researcher and participants bring to this project qualified, experienced, reflective practitioners who have been teaching for at least six years.

The process of data gathering and the initial phases of analysis are transparent concerning participant input throughout this research. Transparency is deemed essential to allow participants the opportunity to be part of the decisions that guide the processes of gathering, analysing and interpreting their stories (Goodson, 2004; Goodson & Choi, 2008; Pipi et al., 2004; Vaioleti, 2006). To ensure the validity of the data gathered, and
ensure trustworthiness will require the process to be documented and approval obtained from participants that the data and interpretations are an accurate representation of their stories (Mutch, 2013).

**Ethical considerations**
The wellbeing of participants was paramount throughout the process of this project. Ethical considerations were ongoing. It was incumbent on the researcher to be aware of tensions, obligations and responsibilities in the relationship with the participants and this part of the narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). From the initial discussions to gaining informed consent, and the gathering of stories and analysis to the final write up of the thesis the project aimed for transparency to participants as far as was possible. Participants were able to withdraw up to two weeks following data collection. The principles and values of Kaupapa Maori were used to guide respectful interactions with participants. To use the principles of Whanaungatanga, Aroha and Mahaki (Pipi et al., 2004; Smith & Cram, n.d) to guide and to maintain a high level of trust and to be responsive to participants’ wellbeing. The relationship between researcher and participants is foundational to this research project to gain the trust of sharing personal perspectives on education. The possibility of conflict and objectivity were discussed at the first meeting to ensure participants felt secure. The context of this research project of the possibility of unknown participants that may be recommended by people that have power over them, i.e. principal recommendations, so, to mitigate this risk, confidentiality and anonymity was assured.

**Conclusion**
The design of this research comes from the researcher’s belief in a ‘language of possibilities’ (Leonard & McLaren, 1993) “…that is, the type of praxis required for people to become active participants in shaping economic, social, cultural and subjective formations that affect their lives and the lives of others” (p. xii). The view of this research project is to document experienced teachers, to hear their experiences, values and beliefs that they hold on education in answering the aim of gathering tacit knowledge into transformational education involving competencies. In the next section, the findings of the data are shared.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

In the previous section, the research design was discussed and justified as outlined, and the research method of narrative inquiry was employed, where teachers engaged in conversation and storying around their pedagogy and practice. This research aims to gather tacit knowledge from experienced teachers of reported transformational education regarding key competencies, and this informed the collection and analysis of the data.

As explained in section three, both a narrative and thematic approach was taken in the analysis of data. The data was analysed from a researcher stance, and as anticipated there was a vastness of rich material. It is intentional to present the findings here under the headings of the research questions:

1. How do experienced teachers describe the impact of the New Zealand Curriculum competencies on their practice?
2. What is the potential for teaching and learning if competencies are at the forefront?
3. What are the tensions and challenges of placing competencies at the forefront of teaching and learning?

The participants

At the start of each interview, the participants’ biographical information was gathered identifying how they chose to be a teacher as a profession, what their values and beliefs are on education and finally how they describe the current environment of education in New Zealand.

Teacher A (T.A) Female. Junior Teacher. teaching experience 10+ years. Taught overseas and in several schools in Auckland.
Teacher B (T.B) Intermediate Teacher 6+ years. Female. Taught in one Auckland school.
Teacher C (T.C) Deputy Principal 15+ years. Female. Taught in several schools in the South Island, one school in Auckland.
Teacher D (T.D) Team Leader Years 7-10. 6+ years. Male. Taught in several schools in the North Island, one school overseas and in the South Island.

Teacher E (T.E) Junior Teacher, studying ECE. 15+ years. Female. Taught in several schools in Auckland.

Teacher F (T.F) Junior Teacher. 6+ years. Male. Taught in Auckland schools.

Teacher G (T.G) Middle School Teacher 15+ years. Male. Taught overseas, South Island and in several North Island Schools.

Setting the Scene

The gathering of the data went over ten weeks. Seven teachers told their stories, relating to using the key competencies and the impact of this on their pedagogy and practice. The teachers each chose a suitable location for their interview. Two of the interviews were at their schools, three stories were recorded at their homes, and two were at a cafe. Each interview was transcribed and then returned to the participant for a final edit and acceptance of the transcript.

The person the teacher

Goodson (1981) expressed the idea that teaching is hugely personal and that it was critical we know about the person the teacher is; therefore, the findings from their stories sit with the practitioners' lived experiences.

The participants recalled both why they became teachers, and for those who have been teaching for a while, why they stayed in education. The themes of nurturing and helping people, seeing the growth in children and building relationships between people came through their stories. For some teachers, it was about making a difference. The teachers described themselves as learners and understood their responsibility for the next generation; others called it their mission or calling. They used the words 'joy,' 'love,' 'happiness,' 'fun,' and 'passionate,' to describe their role as a teacher.
The participants have a holistic view of education. Education to the participants is about developing the whole child, not just academics. The data expressed the participants' individual beliefs and values of learning. It became evident from their responses in the narrative approach, the interconnection between pedagogy and themselves, and how often one story or idea was multilayered in their telling. The data provided a rich description that continued to resonate with what they believe is the purpose of education.

The participants shared similar beliefs that the purpose of education is to grow and develop the child, to be the best that they can be, and part of this learning journey involves them understanding themselves as learners, being able to relate to others and to participate in the world. Teacher E provides a summary that sits alongside the other participants beliefs, ‘Education is about developing people as people in every aspect of their development and growth, and very much about learning how to be in the world. It is learning about how to, not only learn, but also to live, and about who people are and how they fit in and how the world works regarding how we relate to each other.’

**Government policies impact on teaching**

The change in language and demeanour used was noticeable when participants answered the question of what it was like to teach in New Zealand. These words were given to express their current situation; "turbulent”, “frustrated”, “difficult”, “a real challenge”, “overwhelmed” and “tough."

*(T.A)* I think you have to be confident in terms of what your beliefs are. Regarding what you know about child development, in terms of what you know is best for your cohort of children at that particular time. Not to be bullied and pushed by political whims and dogma that occurs wherever you work in the world.

Education in New Zealand is currently experiencing a change in government, and although not all issues are related to National Standards, most of the teachers identified this as part of the current climate which is having a significant impact on teaching.
T.C: With the change in government, there's going to be a period of change, which I welcome. It could be a really great opportunity for positive change. I think it's exciting. I think there are huge tensions and anxiety within the sector that's been driven from lots of different places such as national standards, that's putting teachers under huge stress and I worry about the emotional wellbeing, about a lot of teachers really, to be honest.

Overall it was clear from their responses the impact government policy has on teaching. It is a significant finding that the participants see government actions have a direct effect on themselves and their students.

This introduction to the participants has provided an overview as to who these teachers are, what they value and believe is the purpose of education, and how they see themselves in the current education system.

The findings from this data are organised under the three research questions:

1. How do experienced teachers describe the impact of the New Zealand Curriculum competencies on their practice?

2. What is the potential for teaching and learning if competencies are at the forefront?

3. What are the tensions and challenges of placing competencies at the forefront of teaching and learning?

The impact of key competencies on teaching practice

Key competencies have been part of the New Zealand Curriculum since 2007. Overall, the participants all had a story about the different experiences that led them to value and use key competencies in their practice. A notable finding was the identity of pathways it takes to develop a deeper understanding of key competencies, to think and shift their practice towards a competency-based curriculum. The themes include personal beliefs and values, the vision of a school and leadership, thinking differently about teaching and learning, and finally teachers as learners.
The journey to valuing Key Competencies

The data gathered showed that the understanding of the depth and complexity of key competencies and their potential has taken time. It has taken some of the participants years of trialing, experimenting, teaching at different schools, and developing their knowledge of innovative learning practices, which has led them to conclude that the key competencies have to be a ‘priority’ in the curriculum. The teachers expressed that earlier perception of key competencies in hindsight was tokenism as stated by (T.C) (2007)… we started playing with what these key competencies might mean sitting in the new curriculum….Now from a comparison point, it would have been quite tokenism, a little bit shallow. That’s no disrespect. That was just people’s lack of understanding of the full potential of the curriculum…

(T.F) As a first-year teacher, did I truly understand them? No… I think a lot of misunderstanding of schools that I’ve been to, there’s a lot of lip service to their values and they don’t truly use the key competencies to live them out.

Personal experiences, beliefs and values

It became evident from their stories that these participants have a vision of education, influenced by personal experiences, values and belief systems, for example for (T.F) “becoming a parent is an important part of becoming a teacher because you start to view a bit differently. But I think in terms of the competencies, it's …even more so.”

(T.A) I personally have an experience as a new child in to primary school where I was told I was stupid by my first primary school teacher because actually I couldn't hear properly and she didn't realise that. But there was lack of understanding of the whole of me….. to me, that's a real trigger as in to find out what is going on for each child and the why and the how and understanding the nuances and the key competencies actually let you do that.
The participants explained that they relate their experiences of competencies to their purpose of education, describing it as a holistic approach. The conviction they have for using key competencies to lead their teaching and learning was significant.

**The vision of a school and leadership team**

All participants told a similar story about their schools having a ‘vision that resonated with them,’ (T.B). Teaching in schools with a vision that aligned with their purpose of education was essential in their journey. Several teachers were proactive, leaving schools to teach in schools that shared their vision on education, ‘another time when my values were challenged, and it was again, it was quite hard, so I ended up leaving there, and trying to find a school where I would fit,’ (T.D).

(T.A) *... be in a school with a vision that actually, directly relates to all of the key competencies...having found a school that has a vision that actually enables the growth and key competencies to be planned for and done in a daily basis everyday...*

(T.F) *... coming to a school, which goes at its heart we have to worry about the dispositional growth, which is this school’s version of the key competencies, but then empowering teachers to live that out and put it into every single bit of planning.*

**Disruptors in their practice**

The participants identified critical moments in the journey that stood out to them as being a catalyst which led to the impact of key competencies in their practice. The opportunities of working with external experts, participating in conferences and school professional development, focussing on new pedagogies and theories around practice as moments when teachers considered key competencies in more depth. Teacher F recalled, ‘it was recommended by a teacher who I’m connected with on Twitter, and Facebook, and blogging and through the first EdchatNZ conference, the book Key Competencies for the Future by Rosemary Hipkins.’
The implementation of new ideologies in teacher practice; of inquiry, project-based and personalised learning were catalysts for thinking more in-depth about the potential of key competencies as explained by Teacher G,

*Once I started work on that inquiry model, which was around ownership and authentic outcomes then I think you run more into that whole thing of, well this requires management, this requires you to work with us. It requires you seriously to think about those other competencies, like managing self...*

Having the opportunity to be part of the foundation staff in starting a new school was a critical moment for some of the participants. For some, this came from joining a new school that had already been influenced by the importance of key competencies to practice as explained by Teacher C ‘to be working alongside visionary people, who really fully understood the intent of the curriculum and had operated and visited and seen and worked in schools, where the key competencies were driving it, was an incredible opportunity to actually think, "Hey, what can we do here?"

**Thinking differently about teaching and learning**

A significant finding was a paradigm shift; starting to think differently about learning. To change from teaching knowledge in isolation and to start to consider what students need, ‘there's a difference between purposeful for kids and purposeful for teachers’ (T.D). The participants expressed how their thinking changed about the nature of teaching and learning. How they saw the relationship between themselves and the learner by asking, who was controlling the learning?

*(T.E) I started to think about, how do you empower the child?...What is key and central for you is what grows and develops. They are all so interrelated, and that's the hard thing isn't it? Our brain sees connections and lots of patterns and relationships, so they're altogether related. But I think with time and with play and with watching children do everything, it's about holistic growth...thinking about how*
you learn as an adult, really altered the way I looked at how children learn. It wasn't about what they learned, it was about what do you do, and it was about process.

As the stories unfolded, the purpose of education became defined from a future-focused point of view. The world was changing, and education needed to prepare them for this, (T.C) We're dealing with complexity and change and if the system doesn't change, if we're so static and rigid in our approach, how can we ever hope to prepare these children for what's coming next or just daily life out there.

T.D: ...there's a difference between purposeful for kids and purposeful for teachers, because purposeful for teachers could mean they're doing this because they have to have it for a test. Whereas purposeful for kids, they're doing this because they want to start a business or they want to do something for the community or they want to make a garden, which they can give food away to people. That's REAL purpose.

The teacher and learner relationship

Identifying the nature of the relationship between the teacher and learner, to consider the needs of the students, to get to know them and what they need, these findings add value and evidence of how this is achieved.

To be aware of “the impact of the child in the process, versus my impact” (T.E). The participants expressed that there is a deliberate intention to place the student and their needs at the forefront of learning, “education is not a profession or a job, it's a human endeavour to heal, to know and to see the human in front of you, to meet their needs” (T.B) and finally (T.A)... “we need to be designing learning that meets those needs and you use the key competencies are such a useful tool to make that happen....”
Teachers as learners
The fundamental finding was that participants identified being a learner was an essential part of being a teacher, combining theory and practice. All participants could reflect on the influence of various courses and educators, and how they take it upon themselves to research theories and relate these back to practice, by trialing and experimenting with ideas; “to be brave in your learning design to get the best, but it's not to just go and do it on a whim; it's to be evidenced in terms of your teaching, as inquiry, in terms of collaboration with colleagues” (T.A), another example from (T.E) “the only way that we'll get to a real understanding of it is to actually be in it, doing it...thinking about it makes you try different things and watching and observing and watching what children are doing.”

Autonomy
The participants also identified autonomy as key for their learning, also the need to value time and space to trial, explore new thinking and ideas as stated by (T.E) ‘reflection and space to explore and experiment are essential,’ and backed up by (T.B) ‘I had autonomy to grow and I don't always do things right but sometimes that's what you need to know what's right and wrong.’ It was in these times that their practices change and that the impact of competencies begins to come through as leading their teaching and learning. The discussions among the participants’ colleagues provide valuable reflection and feedback for them to process their thinking and unpack their learning. The teachers felt trusted by the leadership team, and this then had a positive effect on their practice, ‘the culture of the organisation means that you are permitted to try out” (T.A). It was within this culture they were able to think and reflect on their professional learning and apply it to their practice.

Professional learning and Collaborating with Colleagues
The role of professional learning that is personalised and ongoing was a key finding. The professional learning was anywhere from formal to informal conversations; school led to teachers personally inquiring into their knowledge and practice of using key competencies, “it impacted on me starting to think about what I was doing and why I was
doing it.” (T.E), relating to this (T.B) “so it was through all that that I started to understand what competencies or dispositions really were…”

Professional learning is often driven by the participants, they explain how reading and reflecting on books written by other educationists on the topic of key competencies was part of their personal and professional development. Teacher F described ‘The book Key Competencies for the Future by Rosemary Hipkins... It made me start to think about key competencies every single day in relation to my kids and what they were doing.’ ‘I was doing quite a lot of reading around different people that had touched on dispositional-based learning… I definitely had in my head that what was important was dispositional learning, so I wanted the majority of the day to be about that.’ (T.E)

The data identified collaboration with colleagues, enabling them to critically explore the ideas and the impact of using key competencies in their teaching and learning. (T.A) describes the significance of working collaboratively, ‘It's your professional learning, and then ILE, MLE, whatever you want to call it with colleagues is like professional learning on steroids. It is not just me talking to myself and reflecting with myself at the end of the day about what I can best do or occasionally at team meetings, it is really deep, it's really critical.’

There have been three predominant themes in this section; the first finding is that the participants bring their values and beliefs about education into their practice. It was found that being a ‘lone voice’ in a school does not facilitate change; therefore, all have sought environments that are strong both in vision and in collaboration with colleagues.

The second finding the participants expressed was how thinking differently about teaching and learning, aligning it with the purpose of education has seen them value and implement the key competencies. The impact of key competencies on teaching and learning meets the needs of students; this also includes their role as a teacher and that of the student.
Finally, the participants through their stories acknowledged that being learners themselves had been pivotal to get them to be at a place of seeing the impact of key competencies on their practice, including having autonomy, exposed to professional learning whether from their schools, education communities or initiated by themselves.

The impact of key competencies is complicated and does not stand by itself in their stories, woven in their experiences, often subtly and to the bigger picture of the purpose of education.

**The potential of key competencies for leading teaching and learning**

The overall dominant theme espoused throughout the data was their rhetoric that competencies should be leading teaching and learning. Participants reinforced this notion by giving examples of why education needed to move in this direction and identifying the benefits to students. ‘...to grow my understanding of the key competencies and what it could look like in terms of transformative teacher practice and more exciting learning for the kids taking place in schools’ (T. C).

The participants shared about how they saw the potential for key competencies to ‘drive’ the curriculum in the design and implementation of the curriculum by starting from the key competencies, a competency-based curriculum. The data describes the benefits for students, as being more personalised, holistic in growing students and developing students’ needs for a future-focused education.

*(T.E.) It’s almost like we understand now that it’s about how we learn that’s important...I just wonder if we approach it in a different way… ‘This is the key competency and how do all these other things flow into it’...You might say it’s the same thing it’s just the other way around, but it’s not...What is key and central to you is what grows and develops...it’s certainly dispositions/competencies that makes a difference.*
Another theme is how the key competencies connect and support the latest education ideologies and environments with personalised learning and provide an opportunity to transform the curriculum. Finally, the effect on themselves as teachers by teaching this way empowered the teachers in their beliefs in applying theory to practice.

**Key competencies are the driver of curriculum**

A notable finding is that the participants use the key competencies to plan and deliver the curriculum, ‘dispositions are what we tie everything back to. So all our personal learning plans have the dispositions inside them’ (T.D). Specifically, they think about the competencies and then how these relate to the other areas of the curriculum.

(T.C) *I think now they're the priority, so we talk about dispositional curriculum, which is our interpretation of the key competencies and the NZC vision...We wanted the dispositions, the key competencies to drive the curriculum at the school... It's completely different because we have explicitly said that this curriculum is going to be driven by the key competencies... It doesn't sit as a separate entity, so it's a natural part of the teaching and learning...*

The participants gave examples of what they mean by leading the curriculum with competencies, describing their experiences of teaching students using competencies.

(T.C) *This morning I've been working in a junior common with five-year olds, who were working on growing their ability to self-manage. They were involved in lots of different learning activities, stations. Then as part of that process, the kids were engaged in the learning activities...We reflect, we discuss, ‘What did you notice about your self-management?’ Where most people would say, ‘Right, that's just an hour of numeracy and an hour of literacy.’ It's infused.*
‘Learning gets better’ for the student

The participants recalled stories to validate that it was the students that received the most benefit when key competencies were at the forefront of teaching and learning. The whole student is developed beyond just the academics when teaching competencies, growing capabilities that are more transferable to other contexts, developing the lifelong learner. The stories implied it is about the long view of a learner’s development; therefore it needed to be personalised. “They’re [competencies] transferable and those skills can stick with children but learning any part of content beyond your basics can change” (T.F).

A significant new finding of the potential of key competencies is personalising them to the student. To merely approach competencies as a one size fits all model limits the potential for students.

(T.A) Differentiation, but it's differentiation on that personal level. It's knowing, like I was saying earlier, it's knowing the learner, and it's really knowing them deeply and knowing what ticks, and I think that's the change in teaching...The key competencies are such a useful tool to make that happen.

(T.D)...for someone in one situation, might have very high compassion for others, and then in another situation, might not. So, you can't say these are the student's that all have low compassion. Or these are the students who don't have leadership. So let's teach them leadership together, you just can't do that, because it's so situational. So it has to be individualised.

Transform curriculum

A finding from the data is that these competencies transform education as expressed by Teacher B, “I believe if we do use the competencies it will transform it [teaching and learning]. And not just using them but how we’re using them will transform.” Several teachers spoke of how they saw them as a catalyst for changing education. A couple of the participants explored the idea that New Zealand’s mental health issues may benefit
from changing to a key competency designed curriculum. “I have a little hypothesis about how we can use the best practices of Te Whariki [New Zealand’s Early Child Curriculum] and the play-centred, child-centred curriculum in a New Zealand Curriculum. I really feel with the terrible youth suicide rates and mental health that actually a lot to maybe explore in terms of the key competency design” (T.A).

**Influence beyond the classroom**

Finally, it is advocated in the data that now having understood key competencies and their potential to their students and in New Zealand education, the participants feel convinced to share their pedagogy and practice beyond their classroom. The suggestion is that the potential of key competencies may be influential to the teaching profession as Teacher C describes, ‘I just think it's imperative that we change and we continue to push and challenge ourselves and also share the successes that we're experiencing as well, with others because it might help to influence them.’

In this section, the analysed data focused on the benefits of key competencies leading teaching and learning. The overall discourse from the participants is placing the key competencies at the centre of teaching and learning will benefit students. The outcome provides a personalised and holistic education that meets the needs of a future-focused education and enables young people to become lifelong learners to be able to transfer the competency skills across many different contexts.

Within this stance from the participants came the reality of the tensions and challenges they have faced and are currently facing as they deliver a competency-based curriculum approach of teaching and learning to their students.

**The tensions and challenges placing key competencies at the forefront of learning.**

The participants all spoke candidly about the tensions and challenges they faced both personally at the school level, and as part of the broader teaching profession. The central
themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives were about how they perceived the issues relating to how teachers understand the values and vision of education which included the key competencies. The participants are suggesting that teachers think and do differently than the traditional model of education and are aware of the inherited culture of National Standards and assessment. This leads the participants to question the current way of assessing children and the systems within education.

*The purpose of education*

Most of the participants expressed that as a community of educators, did we have the same understanding of what is fundamental when it came to the vision of education? The participants voiced their concerns that without a collective understanding of the direction or vision of education in New Zealand, this will continue to impact how and what we teach in New Zealand. Teacher E summarised this, ‘Is it about what you value and what you believe, or about what you should be seen to value and believe, I guess, in terms of the country or the government. It’s somehow about being on the same page or being able to get everybody’s perspective; so, it doesn’t have to be the same, but there does have to be some common, collective understanding or vision for what is important and what is key.’

The different values and expectations placed on the curriculum and teacher practice make the job description of a teacher ‘overwhelming.’ The tension described from the collected data was of the teacher’s role being continually expanded beyond without thought of what needed to be ‘taken away.’ Teacher E summarises this, ‘...although we have a curriculum that’s really broad and wide, I think there are aspects of what we’re being expected to do as teachers, from the Ministry and the government, that is suggesting that the expectation is much greater than the curriculum. In terms of the focus on making sure there’s a lot of knowledge in lots of different subject areas; how we learn, but what we learn, and just the way we assist children and knowing exactly what we need to know about all these different things. It just is so much that it’s almost overwhelming.’
Understanding the key competencies

The participants reflected on how that their comprehension of the complexity of key competencies and their role in education has changed significantly. They were also aware that this was a challenge in the broader sense of the profession and indicated that this might be a hurdle for others not understanding the potential of the key competencies. Although teachers described how they had a better perception of the competencies they were also aware that they were in the early stages of this process. Teacher F illustrates this, ‘As a first-year teacher, did I truly understand them? No. I think a lot of misunderstanding of schools that I've been to, there's a lot of schools give lip service to their values and they don't truly use the key competencies to live them out...Teachers have got different views on what it means. The principals have another notion…’

Educating communities

The challenge for communities and schools having a shared vision for education, this group of participants were suggesting, was significant. The participants that have established new schools identified the benefits of being able to communicate with their communities from the start about their ‘philosophy for learning which has got the key competencies at the heart,’ (T.C).

The challenge for other participants is to be more proactive in how they engage with the community and other partners. ‘The challenge of actually getting everybody on the same page...finding the time to make sure that people understand and have a clear idea of what's going to make a difference for children,’ (T.E). Teacher A supports this ‘I think lots of communication makes a difference with people, formally and informally, and lots of opportunities for a reciprocal type approach to that communication, too; so, it's like feeding forward and backwards.’

The culture of National Standards

Overall it was clear from the participants’ data that the challenge and tension of National Standards and the inherent culture were more dominant than any other theme. The narrow
focus on reading, writing and mathematics has had an impact on what is being fundamentally explicitly and implicitly becoming the direction of teaching and learning.

*Obviously National Standards has had a big impact on schools. It takes a while, but I think it's slowly impacted on schools and it's impacted on our idea of what learning is. The biggest thing I think for me is that this change and thinking about learning, I feel that we're thinking about measuring learning, (T.G)*

Teacher G went on to suggest that National Standards, ‘becomes perceived as the curriculum...I think we’re just getting this horrible, lean, poor curriculum and it doesn't even work.’

Several of the participants spoke about the dissonance of labelling students at a ‘perceived standard,’ rather than a holistic and personalised education. Teacher F explains ‘take a standard at the end of high school and just work backwards and pay absolutely no attention at all to the different journeys that kids are on, that it is just developmentally, then that's wrong.' For one teacher this resulted in her to ‘leave junior teaching, under the Ministry and National Standards, I was being asked to do things to children that I believed destroyed their soul. I couldn’t be a part of perpetuating those ideas and that system’ (T.B). One participant, Teacher F, agreed with the need for key performance indicators, i.e. National Standards but declared ‘that we’ve picked the wrong indicators, and we've made it, so we've got way too many boxes to tick.’

*Pressures of assessment*

The pressure of assessment became a barrier to implementing the type of teaching and learning the participants wanted to practice, ‘until that mindset shifts away from National Standards and teach to the test and tail end' (T.C). The challenge of fulfilling the requirements of assessment highlighted whether this has any direct advantage to students across the curriculum. As told by Teacher C, ‘The preoccupation with assessment has meant a shift from ‘we’re thinking about measuring learning… so rather than just saying, what are we teaching, this is about how can we measure what's teaching.’
The data showed the dissonance between what the participants wanted to focus on in their teaching and what they needed to teach so that their students were successful on what is measured. This story suggests along with others the tension between a student-centred education and one driven by the assessment in a narrow focus on learning.

_I think that relates to the bigger picture, which I guess National Standards have grown out of, which is this idea that efficiency comes from doing something then measuring it and then seeing if you've improved, which sounds fine. If you've improved then you know you're on the right track and if it's not improving, you're on the wrong track. Using that as a model, I'm sure it works in some industries, like if you're growing apples or something. Where you put more fertiliser in and there are more apples, but I think in education, there's just too many variables. I don't think it's meaningful, so I think that's going to be an ongoing challenge even with national standard disappearing, the thing of how do we focus on learning, not measuring learning? A big thing for teachers is that they lose track of that, the purpose of education._ (T.G)

**How we measure learning**

It became evident from the data that the existing methods of measuring students are inadequate to measure the learning that teachers saw as fundamental.

_That's the real tension between us as teachers, how we measure our children isn't it. There's a lot of things, but if you look at it like that, we only measure these three things [reading, writing, mathematics]. If you don't fit in then how do you build competency, how do you build self-esteem, how do you build risk-taking and all the things you need if you are knocked down all the time, (T B)._

The notion was suggested, to have assessments to align with the new thinking around learning. Teacher G identifies this 'just going back to our old ways of measuring...there's
not one new bit of testing that we're doing to assess whether kids are okay or not.' Teacher E agrees 'assessing what kids could do and the skills they had, not the attitudes and the capabilities of how they were learning. So, we were looking at the wrong things, not how we learn, and our focus and our planning needed to be around how they learn.'

**Systems**

An unexpected finding from participants identified the need for better systems around professional learning and the use of processes to facilitate the learning cycle. Teacher G talks about, 'I don't think we had the systems in place about how to make that work. I think probably at this school there's more systems that are in place, to help you. Certainly not all the answers.'

Although the stories are about them individually, the reality of them working within a larger organisation identified systems as a tension that they all experienced. Teacher C identifies ‘there's a real lack of professional support for schools, quality support for schools, principals and staff at the moment. I think it's really challenging. I would hope that we can shift our focus back to the intent of the NZC…’

This overall encompassing idea of systems whether it involves: assessment, professional development, teaching and learning, government initiatives, or the curriculum demonstrates that having the right systems in place is central to all aspects of this research.

**Voice and influence of teachers and schools**

The final theme is about the participants being heard and how often they feel like they do not influence what is happening at a school and again at a national level. The feeling of being isolated and wanting to be part of something bigger, to be a voice of influence was resonated by the participants. To be instrumental beyond their schools directly correlates to the finding in the potential of key competencies that the participants have something to say about leading with a competency-based curriculum.
It's so hard to change from the bottom. It's really hard. I think, just as if you're a teacher in a school, it's really hard to change the leadership. And if you're a leader in a school, it's really hard to change the people who are giving you orders; and it is the ministry, and it is the government. (T.D)

Teacher B explains it further, 'the more I think I have to be somewhere else. It's not going to happen with me being a teacher. It could happen, but I'm going to need someone that I then communicate, I have to be in a chain. I can't be in an isolated classroom on my own. I can be a teacher, but I have to be in a chain where I've got a voice of influence.'

What's Next?
This question was posed to each of the participants at the end of each interview, as part of Leadbetter’s definition of having a deeper understanding of concepts to have a dispositional of thinking about, ‘what's next?’ Teacher E promotes the theme of key competencies can open up possibilities.

It feels for me like I'm just scraping the surface of it, like it's just a new-found world of the possibility. I think we need to reflect more on why we do things. There's so much to do as a teacher that you're often in the moment, which is good, but you don't often take the time to stop and really question what you're doing and why you're doing it. I think if we spent more time doing that, then we would consider the use of competencies more. It's different; it would transform teaching and learning. (T.E)

The concern was documented from several participants about how any progress, as in new ideologies, theories and practice can quickly become ‘packaged,’ Teacher B suggests ‘the danger with anything is that it gets simplified down to... here's a key competency kit, here's the numeracy project. We need a whole overhaul of how we understand humans to be able to do that, At the moment we have a mechanical system, but we teach organic beings. We need an organic living system of education... I think they
[key competencies] will transform your learning and teaching because your focus is different.’

Several teachers expressed the need for ‘all have to be braver’ (T.B). The idea that there are people out there that want to change how we educate our young people, but how do we get them together to challenge the status quo. Teacher D expresses what others agree with, ‘it’s like a glacial pace,’ the participants have heard messages of change for twenty years, the same type of innovations and ideals about education, the question is ‘it’s not transforming it really, it's just tweaking it.’

Most of the participants concluded that it was time to rethink the curriculum, to interpret the curriculum in a holistic view that placed key competencies at the forefront of education. ‘I think as a profession, if we really value key competencies, then we say, "This is where we start. Our curriculum becomes built around it rather than them just being there. Everything to come from them. I just think we need to see the competencies as the focus.’ (T.E).

As already suggested systems including legislation come through from their stories. The participants were also concerned about ‘missing the mark altogether’ when it came to systems to support the implementation and a more in-depth understanding of key competencies. The teachers acknowledged the enormity of the task, but also know the result of doing nothing.

I think systemically, there needs to be huge shifts and they need to relook at professional development, what that looks like, who's delivering it? They need to go back to actually focusing on these dispositions and skill sets and helping to educate teachers… I think in some ways, a physically bill can help influence pedagogical change. (T.C)
Summary of the narratives

Seven participants were asked to tell their stories around their context for key competencies and how these had transformed their teaching practice. The impact of the New Zealand Curriculum competencies on their practice begins with the journey of valuing key competencies, by aligning their personal experiences, beliefs and values. They chose to teach in schools that have a vision and a leadership team that supports their practice of a competency-based curriculum. There have been critical moments that have impacted their practice in their journey with key competencies which has led them to think differently about learning and to consider the purpose of education. The impact of the competencies is delivering a future-focused curriculum and to changing the dynamics of the teacher and learner relationship. Finally, the impact on their practice has seen these teachers identify the importance of themselves as learners; having autonomy is essential, along with effective professional learning led by schools and them personally, and lastly collaborating has enhanced their learning.

The participants have described the potential of key competencies for leading teaching and learning as being the ‘driver’ of the New Zealand curriculum, transforming it beyond what it currently is. The learning becomes ‘better for the students’ – this encompasses the notion of growing learners by personalising their learning. Ultimately their personal experiences with the potential of key competencies leading teaching and learning have them considering the impact and influence beyond the classroom.

Within all these participants’ experiences, they described the challenges and tensions that they experience using key competencies at the forefront of their teaching. They identify that not everyone shares the same vision for education. This makes for an overloaded curriculum and a misalignment with what is valued and assessed. The misunderstanding of key competencies and the culture of National Standards are a key factor causing tension for these participants. The systems within education cause challenges in delivering significant professional development and facilitating the learning and teaching cycle. Finally, allowing the voice and influence of schools and teachers leading with key competencies, they spoke about the challenge of being heard.
The more we understand the competencies, the more we go down that pathway and put them in the centre of our teaching and learning, then the more our teaching and learning would actually transform and change. With that would be a far more future-focused curriculum, and far more personalised to the student, (T.E).

The next section shares the findings of the focus group session, which is based on the initial themes of the above narratives.

Findings of the focus group
A focus group of three met in a cafe after the researcher had made initial notes on the collection of stories. It was evident from the stories gathered that all teachers placed the importance of key competencies at the centre of teaching and learning, to fulfil the New Zealand Curriculum vision for young people.

The focus group was given three questions to consider and reflect on before meeting up:
What are the main ideas for bringing key competencies to the forefront of teaching and learning?
What does it look like for a student when teaching and learning are focused on the competencies?
How does the connection between theory and practice play a part in all of this?
Finally, they were asked to consider again, ‘what’s next?’

The participants of the focus group discussed many ideas, sharing their experiences and thoughts on these questions. As noted by the researcher, when telling individual stories, the nature of education is the complexity and interconnection of the different parts makes it often difficult to answer one question succinctly. The researcher recorded the session on paper, making notes as the participants spoke. At times the researcher asked the participants to confirm their thinking to ensure the intent of the discussion was an accurate record.
The data was analysed using a narrative and a thematic analysis approach. These are the findings from the focus group meeting, to ensure key competencies are at the forefront of teaching and learning to fulfil the holistic vision of the New Zealand curriculum. The validation of the student's education experience when key competencies are valued and provide for personalised learning. Finally, the theory is providing evidence for teaching practice to head in this direction.

**To place key competencies at the forefront of teaching and learning.**

The focus group discussed ideas of what they value in education and the beliefs held around education were holistic. It is about getting people to engage in conversations about what 'success' looks like for that child and how do we measure this 'success.' The participants spoke of the vision aligning to the values and beliefs based on recognising the theories and latest research on human development and neuroscience that explains how children learn.

The participants spoke of the vision concerning the ‘whole,’ success in all aspects of learning. The vision is about creating a lifelong learner, that is having experiences in a future-focused education based on key competencies; therefore moving away from the industrial model of education an input-output ideology controlled by a teacher. The primary emphasis of a vision for education is taking a long-term view of what is essential for the child in front of the teacher. The individual’s identity; ‘knowing the child and the child knows themselves’ and how they relate to others. Education is about growing the next generation and having a vision that connects the parts to the whole.

The participants spoke of having a universal language of using and understanding key competencies. This shared language for everyone to support the metacognitive, motivation and cognitive aspects of learning to use key competencies. To facilitate a deeper understanding of key competencies and their application to teacher practice, the recommendation is for more professional development and a higher expectation of teachers using key competencies.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS, LIMITATIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature and the research aim of gathering tacit knowledge from experienced teachers to investigate the connection between competencies and transformational practice. The findings may seem to echo the numerous studies on key competencies, reiterating what has been already commented on since the origin of key competencies. It would seem that these participants have found the same challenges and taken the same process as others before them. Their stories are of individuals who have navigated the process and have now come to the conclusion that the way forward in educating our young people is to LEAD with key competencies. Their passion is for making a difference to not only the learners before them but to be part of a louder gathering of voices to transform teaching and learning.

The discussion begins with acknowledging the role of the participants themselves, the journey from defining their personal beliefs and values against the purpose for education, which leads to them thinking differently about teaching and learning and how they came to interpret the place of key competencies in the NZC. It highlights the tensions and challenges faced as these participants outwork their vision for education.

The next section explains that key competencies are the catalyst to lead teaching and learning, therefore the curriculum. The transformative features of key competencies and the notion of requiring systems to transform these changes are significant findings. The research indicates possibilities for ‘what is next’ for education. Again, the tensions and challenges will be acknowledged concerning how the participants see key competencies as the connector between vision, theory and practice and their reality.

The final section highlights an unanticipated finding, the overwhelming conviction that these practitioners want a voice beyond the classroom. The practitioners want to have a broader impact and be influential; they are ‘warrior intellectuals’ that are willing to be
advocates for students (Freire, 1968) as they actively seek a place for key competencies to lead the curriculum being the ‘change agent’ that Hipkins and McDowall (2013) professed.

Following the discussion on the findings, the strengths and limitation of this research and proposed areas for further study are identified. The conclusion presents possibilities to the research aim of the connection between key competencies and transformational practice. Finally, the recommendations that have come out of this research are presented.

The journey of the teacher

*The teacher and the purpose of education*

Rychen and Salynik (2002) argued that a top-down, bottom-up approach required teachers to be involved in research and that their personal experiences were to be acknowledged as real-world experts. Hipkins (2009) agrees that for teacher practice to change they must understand and own the compelling reasons as to why teaching and learning have to change. The study reinforced that the person a teacher is has an impact on the curriculum, how their personal experiences, values and beliefs shape their thinking of the purpose of education. The lens they see education through leads to them being deliberate in choosing schools that align with their vision for education and supports this practice.

It was noted that several of the participants had found it hard being the ‘lone voice’ in schools, stating that being a teacher they felt they did not have an impact on the school leadership, this led them to seek like-minded schools. This conviction of the purpose of education is the reason that they continue to question, challenge, trial, experiment and push the boundaries of status quo teaching and learning. Delors (2006) argues that education has a prominent role in the personal and social development and that of all people with a sense of responsibility (Freire (1968) describes teachers with moral and ethical convictions), turn their attention to both the aims and means of education.
"Education is about developing people as people in every aspect of their development and growth, and very much about learning how to be in the world. It is learning about how to, not only learn, but also to live, and about who people are and how they fit in and how the world works regarding how we relate to each other. (T.E)"

The findings from this thesis concur with the current vision of OECD’s (2018) The Future of Education and Skills 2030 Project for future proofing education to 2030.

"We are committed to helping every learner develop as a whole person, fulfil his or her potential and help shape a shared future built on the well-being of individuals, communities and the planet (OECD, 2018 p.3)"

The significance of this finding would suggest that more is done for teachers to understand themselves in the process of teaching and learning by identifying their values and beliefs in education. If this is the starting point for transformation practice, then it would be wise to invest in a system that promotes self-awareness, a skill needed as a lifelong learner.

**Tensions and Challenges of the Purpose of Education**

Findings from the study revealed three key factors: not having a shared vision, the overloaded curriculum and what is assessed were noted by the participants as inhibitors of fulfilling the vision of the NZC. Therefore educators, school leadership, communities, and policymakers do not have a shared belief or vision for education (Rychen & Salynik, 2001, 2002; Hipkins, 2009). It is this confusion about the purpose that creates an overloaded curriculum (Hipkins, 2006; Robinson, 2015) due to a misalignment in what is valued, is therefore assessed (Bolstad et al., 2012; Brewton, 2004b) which is therefore taught and leads to a hierarchy of subjects or continues to support a more traditional direction of a school.

Although these issues have been foreshadowed, identified and addressed in the literature and identified again in this thesis’ literature review, to have these confirmed in this study
implies that more urgent effort and new ways of confronting these issues is needed. The emphasis on research is not translating to action.

**Thinking differently about teaching and learning**

The paradigm shift that ensures sustained progress and inspires teachers to keep challenging their practice.

**Teachers as learners**

The findings identified participants’ continuous reflective practice developed out of theory, trialing and experimenting, and evaluating reflects the literature describing ongoing professional development needed for innovation and sustainability (Bolstad et al., 2012 Hipkins et al., 2014). The participants’ professional development included external experts, conferences, school and personal professional development, and what they had in common was the fact they focused on new pedagogies, ideologies and theories on why teaching and learning need to change and the practice to support these changes. Again, these varied with each story: inquiry, project-based learning, personalised learning, brain-based learning, implementation of digital technologies, in more recent developments establishing ILE schools and play-based learning. The literature agrees that educators have to confront and disrupt their thinking and practice if real change is to occur (Timperley et al., 2007). The evidence supports that what is fundamental to these practitioners is for them to continue to inquire, ‘What do we think young people need to learn at school?’ (Brewton, 2004a).

An important finding is about cultivating a culture that allows for continuous improvement and development of new practice and ideas in the literature, it supports having time and space (Reid, 2006). Other factors include having autonomy and permission to take risks to experiment with new thinking and ideas. The findings confirm the professionalism of these participants; they continue to develop their professional knowledge through their investigation and informal and formal conversation with colleagues; collaboration in ILE environments was beneficial. Finally, being in the schools that challenged and inspired
their thinking and practice. These findings confirm and provide the fundamentals of a culture of innovation and trust given to teachers in environments that the practitioner can successfully sustain motivation beyond the initial enthusiasm (Cowie et al., 2011) for new ideas and thinking.

_We’re dealing with complexity and change and if the system doesn’t change, if we’re so static and rigid in our approach, how can we ever hope to prepare these children for what’s coming next or just daily life out there._ (T. C)

_The future is uncertain, and we cannot predict it; but we need to be open and ready for it._ (OECD, 2018, p.2)

The findings from this study confirm that the participants have a deliberate intention to place the student and their needs at the forefront of learning. They consider how students learn and what they need to be successful now, and for the future, and this is a major disruptor for their practice, knowing the ‘why’ they needed to change. The literature supports that education needs to equip learners with agency, a sense of purpose and the competencies they need to shape their own lives and contribute to the lives of others, to prepare them for the future (Clark, 2009; Hipkins et al., 2014; OECD, 2018).

**Teacher and student roles**

In this research, the change in the teacher and student roles is not explicitly expressed, though it was implied in the way they spoke about their students and how they described their practice. It has been highlighted because these participants understand the balance of ‘the impact of the child in the process versus their impact,’ as described by Teacher E. This change is forefront in the thinking, ‘to know and see the human in front of them, to meet their needs.’ Bolstad et al. (2012) argues that schools will need to shift our perception of what schools are for and their knowledge of the roles and responsibilities for teaching and schools.
Tensions and challenges for thinking differently about teaching and learning

Findings in this research identified that the community focus and the inherited culture of National Standards are tensions for the participants when thinking differently about education and changing their practice. Delors’s (2002) report discusses the tensions between tradition and modernity, between long-term and short-term consideration. How public opinion often wants quick answers and ready solutions, whereas many problems call for concerted, negotiated strategies for reform. He stated this might be the case in education policies that short-term considerations are used, and pressures of competition have caused people in authority to lose sight of their mission.

I feel that although we have a curriculum that's really broad and wide, I think there are aspects of what we're being expected to do as teachers, from the ministry and the government, that is suggesting that the expectation is much greater than the curriculum. In terms of the focus on making sure there's a lot of knowledge in lots of different subjects areas; how we learn, but what we learn, and just the way we assist children and knowing exactly what we need to know about all these different things. It just is so much that it's almost overwhelming, (T.E).

The culture of National Standards

The findings confirm the impact that political policy has on teachers. The relatively short-term National Standards impact on teaching and learning has created a culture that participants voiced will 'be hard to shift.' ‘It’s had a big impact on schools,’ … ‘it becomes perceived as the curriculum,’ ‘until the mindset shifts away from National Standards and teach to the test and tail end.’ ‘We have picked the wrong indicators’, and for one participant they stopped teaching junior students as they ‘couldn’t be part of perpetuating those ideas and that system’ even the impact noted by one participant on the well-being of staff, ' that is putting huge stress on teachers.'
The study indicated that National Standards and the culture of assessment are the central tension for these educators in their current practice. The inherited value of National Standards and the narrowing curriculum focus on reading, writing and mathematics (number and algebra) becomes what is valued and measured by communities and schools.

It is interesting to note that in all the research completed in New Zealand the influence and impact of National Standards have not been prominent as possible factors as to why the key competencies and the transformation of NZC have not been more successful.

The findings in this thesis suggest that they have a huge influence and impact on schools, teachers and students. The closest research that supports these thesis findings is a report by Bonne (2016), National Standards in their Seventh Year: Findings from NZCER National Survey of Primary and Intermediate Schools. The report data shows that two-thirds of teachers reported a narrowing curriculum that they teach; 32% identify that National Standards drives what their school does: 40% say that literacy and mathematics have taken their attention away from other aspects of the curriculum. What is interesting is the jump from 50% in 2013 to 69% in 2016 identifying the narrowing of the curriculum and the step up from 41% in 2013 to 63% in 2016 saying that National Standards has negatively affected some students’ learning and caused anxiety. The purpose of sharing these statistics is to highlight where the attention of schools has been, and the reality that over the years the National Standards’ impact on teachers and schools has increased.

Support of communities

*We’re always a few steps ahead of the community because we have to educate them, as well as our staff, who are coming into an ILE space. I think the community here, because they understand our philosophy for learning which has got the key competencies at the heart.* (T.C)
The findings implied that it was necessary to create dissonance amongst communities by getting them to see the widening gap between the kinds of learning needed for our students versus the education they were receiving. Bolstad et al. (2013) and Robinson (2015) propose that this is the biggest challenge for education, that two epistemologies emerge, the traditional and hierarchical idea of knowledge as content and skills from learning areas or the second idea that knowledge is about a verb, creating and using new knowledge to solve problems and find solutions. Delors (2002) extends this definition by identifying the four pillars of learning: To Be, To Live Together, To Know and To Do, furthering the aims and the means of education. The findings in this thesis support the latter understanding of knowledge and initiate the idea of key competencies leading teaching and learning as the way forward.

“So, there's something in education, of the challenge of actually getting everybody on the same page. The journey is about so much more than the child or just you as the teacher. It's that whole bigger picture that that child is involved in, so certainly some challenges in the current system around perhaps in valuing that again and finding the time to make sure that people understand and have a clear idea of what's going to make a difference for children. (T.E)

The literature discusses that broader public support for teachers and school leaders is required for a paradigm shift in practice (Bolstad et al., 2013; Delors, 2002). This research agrees with the reality of needing communities to support the shifts needed in education, and of the challenge of having all stakeholders agree to a vision of education. The findings note that a shared vision meant rethinking what is valued, and therefore measured: ‘we’re thinking about measuring learning...so rather than just saying what are we teaching?’ The culture of National Standards perpetuates the pressures of assessment and the narrow focus on what's measured and taught; this has influenced how communities view education.
The findings would suggest that communities need to play a larger part in unpacking their values and beliefs of education.

Mental health issues

An unexpected theme recurred throughout the study, and this was about an increase in anxiety and mental health issues in New Zealand, the practitioners giving examples of the increase amongst their students. A discussion on increased mental health issues may offer a reason why our communities need to rethink education. What these participants believe is that the purpose of education is about developing the whole person including their well-being and that the key competencies have an essential role. OECD (2018) declare that broader educational goals need to address the individual and collective well-being, and from the literature, it discusses a ‘hope for a world that is better placed to live in...’ Delors, (1996).

The teacher profession's understanding of the complexity and potential of key competencies.

Hipkins and McDowall (2013), as discussed in the literature review, know the potential for key competencies to be transformative but have stated that this depends on how they are interpreted and implemented. The surface or tokenism perception inhibits the key competencies from acting as the intended agents of change. The challenge of knowing the intention and the value of key competencies from teachers and all stakeholders has been well documented both overseas and in New Zealand (Claxton et al., 2011; Hipkins and Boyd, 2011; Rychen & Salynik, 2002., 2001).

Key competencies leading curriculum: theory + practice + vision = challenge to the status quo

The findings are explicit that key competencies are to be ‘driving’ the curriculum.
As soon as you put competencies at the forefront of the curriculum and you put that next to a child, then I don’t understand how you could even be able to go wrong. (T.B)

The literature discusses the place key competencies take in the NZ curriculum; they are to be woven into the learning areas to create the taught curriculum (Brewton, 2004b; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013). The literature confirms that key competencies can be a catalyst for change and be a vital role in offering changes in education (Hipkins & McDowall, 2013; Hipkins et al., 2014). The findings in this thesis confirm this notion of change; the potential of key competencies leading the curriculum so ‘that we build our education system and the curriculum around the learner rather than the learner having to fit the system.’ Hon Hekia Parata, (2012) offers a new way of thinking in the foreword of Supporting Future-Oriented Learning and Teaching – a New Zealand Perspective. A recommendation from the literature of the MOE (2007) stating that the new NZC was a chance to think differently about the curriculum, to use the 21st-century focus as a new paradigm in education.

The findings in this study provide evidence of how teachers can achieve placing competencies at the forefront of the curriculum. The participants of the research are requesting that more is needed to get other schools and communities to understand key competencies and the benefits to young people.

**The potential of key competencies**

*Because at the heart of learning, as a human being and at the heart of the human being they have to communicate, and they have to be able to get on with other people, and they have to be able to manage themselves, and they have to think. That’s the heart of life. (T. G)*

*What is key and central to you is what grows and develops...it’s certainly dispositions, competencies that make a difference. (T. E)*
The social-cultural theory that Hipkins (2006) identified as being the basis of the key competencies’ framework, is confirmed in these findings in challenging the curriculum to start from key competencies. The findings confirm and support the literature that leading with key competencies brings together new theories, pedagogies and practices including collaborative learning environments, personalised learning, neuroscience advances in how we learn, new concepts of knowledge and learning theories and the revival of philosophical arguments (Gonzoni, 2002).

Using these findings provides further evidence of exemplary practice and pathways to achieve a transformed curriculum. This correlates to the ideas in the literature that the process of a continuing effort to combine theoretical, empirical and practice is paramount in creating the changes in education to deliver the purpose of key competencies (Bolstad et al., 2012; Burgon et al., 2012; Goodson & Hargreaves, 2003; Rychen & Salganik, 2001).

Personalising key competencies to the student is an unexpected finding, the key competencies are generally discussed in a context of specific competencies taught through contexts across a group or class of students (Hipkins et al., 2014). Teacher D describes ‘we personalise dispositions because everyone is different… and I guess there are different aspects of each disposition.’ The finding that the development and growth of competencies in students is personal supports the literature on honouring diversity that comes through personalising learning to provide equal opportunities (Rychen & Salganik, 2002) and to fulfil the potential of every student, and this goes beyond the traditional and hierarchical view of knowledge (OECD, 2018; Robinson, 2014).

**Systems: a tension and challenge**

It is well documented in the literature that systems are needed to sustain and support change (Brewton, 2004a; Hipkins & McDowall, 2013; Hipkins et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014; Rychen & Salyink, 2002). Systems need a robust design incorporating vision and strategies (OECD, 2018) that support imagination, innovation and possibilities (Hipkins et
Finally, a systematic change needs to take place at different levels and in different settings to be sustainable (Robinson, 2014; Rychen & Salyink, 2002).

The tension with systems not supporting these participants was a theme emerging under various themes. The internal personal systems of institutionalised practice are identified as a challenge for several of the participants, having to 'unschool', rethink, relearn and realign their thinking and practice so as not to go back to old habits. Teacher C describes a lack of ‘professional’ and ‘quality support for schools’ indicating that their ‘hope to shift the focus back to the intent of NZC’ speaks to the vision needs to align with the systems. The concern of systems to become ‘checklists’ or the ‘wrong indicators’ or ‘simplified down to a kit’ or, as the literature suggests, ‘name and hope’ (Reid, 2006) is the implication that those that create and administer them have not been clear on the purpose or the intentions of the systems.

The findings would suggest a more deliberate approach, that was systemic to broaden and create a sense of urgency to get more practitioners involved with leading their teaching and learning with key competencies.

The findings revealed that funding systems created challenges in what several of the participants described as ‘lack of resourcing’ that were a barrier to children having access to an education that they deserve. The feeling of being ‘a bottom of the cliff scenario' has made it 'tough and frustrating for teachers.' There needs more emphasis and research into how funding can support ‘what is valued’ as a bigger picture than education, but how we value children. The theme of funding is acknowledged but falls out of the aim of this project though points to the heart of this research: what is important and valued for children.

**Teachers Beyond Classrooms: Impact and influence**

*Reclaim the right of school to act as resources for their communities to imagine and rebuild futures they want. (Facer, 2011 p.21)*
The findings from this study revealed a depth of conviction for the practitioners to be influential beyond their ‘classroom’ or school. The need to have a larger impact, has become for some their ‘where to next?’

Teacher B describes the feelings of other participants of not wanting to be isolated in their classroom or school but needing ‘to be in a chain where they can be a voice of influence.’ The findings present a belief that a change of how teachers have a say in education to a wider audience is about continuing challenging their profession and to ‘share the success that we’re experiencing as well with others because it might help to influence them’ as stated by Teacher C. The literature agrees on this insight, that this tacit knowledge has to transfer to others. Using exemplars in the form of experienced and innovative teachers who have been implementing and growing their comprehension of the deeper layers of the competencies need to transfer to others and work with more researcher-practitioner partnerships (Hipkins & McDowall, 2013; Hipkins et al., 2014; Goodson, 2003; Kincheloe, 2003, 2008; Robinson, 2015). These participants are not bystanders by choice, the final challenge is for them to have a louder voice, become part of a collective that has the answers to outwork a curriculum, and the vision of educating children ‘to be confident, connected and actively involved, lifelong learners’ (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.38).

This is where we start. Our curriculum becomes built around it rather than just being there. Everything to come from them. I just think we need to see the competencies as the focus. (T. E).

New Zealand education needs a rethink and radical innovation in light of the last decades’ focus on National Standards. A systematic change needs to take place at different levels and in different settings to have a change in sustaining and changing the current status quo. The findings from this research argue that a way forward is to realign the purpose and vision of education, understand the depth and complexity of competencies/dispositions/capabilities and use these as the catalyst to lead teaching and
learning in New Zealand. What’s important to note is that in the current climate these participants have done just that; imagine what they could do with more support and for others to hear their voices. Researchers, policy makers, communities, and school leaders all speak of the changes that are needed – perhaps it is time to listen to the people who are doing it.

_We don’t know what might be still to come._ (McDowall & Hipkins, 2018, p.4)

**Conclusion**

This thesis sets out to critically examine how key competencies can transform education. The research is about gathering stories from experienced teachers who have spent years understanding the NZC and the place key competencies have within their taught curriculum.

_This is where we start. Our curriculum becomes built around it rather than just being there. Everything to come from them. I just think we need to see the competencies as the focus._ (T.E)

In the introduction chapter, it presented that researchers forewarned the reality of implementing new concepts and ideas of the NZC to practice. They suggested that unless the key competencies created a dissonance in their thinking, competencies would become downshifted to ‘name and hope’ or be assimilated into ‘this is what we already do.’ Teaching and learning fail to understand the intention and potential of key competencies, to transform the curriculum, and therefore education. The DeSeCo report identified four concerns for implementing the competencies: that key competencies are a new field; multiple and varied definitions of them; differences of perspectives and ideological lens; and finally the complexity of how to teach key competencies.

The findings in this thesis suggest that it is possible for teachers to fulfil the expectations of the potential of key competencies. More than that the research reveals the hope and
reality for it to be possible to transform education, providing a holistic, personalised education that accepts the long view of the student's journey, that is born out of a collaboration between theory, practice and vision.

This thesis is about acknowledging that teaching and learning do not occur in a void. Personal experiences influence teachers. They align their beliefs and values to the purpose of education, inspired by possibilities of making a difference for children. They are reflective practitioners who use evidence and theory to challenge their practice. These stories are a snapshot of their teachers’ journeys into unpacking their thinking about education through a key competency lens. They offer an insight into how seven different teachers from different journeys come to tell their experiences and conclusively express that key competencies can lead teaching and learning; opening the door to imagining new possibilities.

The journey involves the following:
1. Teachers have personal beliefs and values that are holistic and reflect the longer view of education. They aligned their purpose of education with the vision of like-minded schools.
2. Using current theories and innovative practice that supports the purpose of education they came to rethink teaching and learning, the changing of teacher and learner roles, developing a deeper comprehension of the complexity and potential of key competencies, which led them to drive curriculum through key competencies.
3. The child in front of them, being advocates for them by personalising and suggesting that to reach their potential was about leading with key competencies.
4. The culture of teachers as learners supported by school leadership in a high trust and autonomous environment, providing quality professional development to challenge and inspire. The personal and collaborative inquiry into practice.
5. Teachers are wanting a voice of influence beyond the classroom to help support and facilitate change.
The findings conclusively present these teachers as change agents that have developed their personal understanding of key competencies, describing them as dispositions and having a richer definition then the NZC. In the participants' accounts, key competencies are no longer a new field and although there is a difference in their language and description of the competencies, they all share a similar vision and purpose for education. These findings suggest that key competencies need be at the forefront of teaching and learning, driving the curriculum and enabling current teaching and learning practices that develop lifelong learners empowered to achieve their potential and to become healthy, confident citizens.

Paulo Freire’s (1968) study describes teachers as ‘warrior intellectuals’. Those that know their students and who are willing to be advocates for them, to fight for them. He also declares that the whole activity of education is political. It is within this description these practitioners need to be honoured and held up as exemplars of ‘not being bullied and pushed by political whims and dogma that occurs wherever you work in the world.’

National Standards and its culture have had an impact on these teachers, and, although they are concerned about the legacy of this policy, they have demonstrated how to navigate the course of being brave and innovative, understanding the purpose of education and continuing to imagine possibilities of creating an education to grow learners. From their voices we heard the words describing teaching currently as being "turbulent, frustrated, difficult, a real challenge, overwhelmed, tough." Perhaps this is a warning for current policymakers, to lessen their impact on education.

**Strengths and limitations of the research**

This research paper adds to ‘understandings about the role that key competencies play in the curriculum’ a theme identified in McDowall and Hipkins’ (2018) paper on how competencies have evolved. This study also records the tacit knowledge accumulated by seven different practitioners, for this to add and transfer to others in the profession may
allow for a system-wide shift in the delivery of competencies (Bolstad et al., 2012). This thesis is relevant to teachers, school leaders, researchers, policymakers and communities that are seeking ways to transform education; key competencies open ways for new possibilities.

The strength is this research is evident in the participants' experiences. Honest and thoughtful retrospective stories on how they have continued to push boundaries in innovative ways to prove how key competencies can transform education. They are teachers in New Zealand leading innovative practice that is all ‘about the child in front of their eyes’ (Teacher B). These teachers are passionate about education, but more they are advocates for every child in New Zealand. They implore us to hear their voices, for us to be braver, and for the holistic, well-being of a child to be in the forefront of what we do.

This researcher and practitioner study is a strength of this research, having declared a position as being a teacher and taking a stance as a critical researcher is about improving the opportunities for students in schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kincheloe, 2003). Teachers hold a vision of ‘what could be,’ and use the action of research to fulfil this vision. The restlessness and dissonance of wanting to change the status quo provide a stimulus for inquiring research. This research uses transformative teachers’ experience of their students, culture and current modes of thinking and ideology to help students and communities make sense of the world which surrounds them (Kincheloe, 2003).

The critical researcher throughout the process develops their understanding of the project, and implies specific purposes, political positions, and pedagogy between participants (Kinchloe, 2003). The benefits of teacher research reinforce good teaching by interpreting the significance of ideas and theories on people: the observer can watch the educational phenomenon from within and identify the connections to other groups outside of education. This stance of aligning to a critical researcher approach is either a strength or a limitation depending on the view of the reader.
A limitation that may be considered is the size of the purposive selection of only seven participants from four different schools. The collection of stories consisted of teachers that were chosen for their understanding of key competencies and having had experience teaching in the New Zealand Curriculum. The selection was justified in the methodology; some may see this as a limitation.

**Areas for further research**

Although there has been extensive research completed on key competencies, this thesis suggests that there is new or further research needed.

The misunderstanding and interpretation of the intent and potential of key competencies in the New Zealand curriculum have been well documented in research papers from the NZCER, and this thesis supports this notion. Research is needed to redefine the New Zealand Curriculum competencies, involving the ongoing discussion taking place globally on education. There is an opportunity for further research on ‘where to next’ with competencies including the categories, definitions and their place in the curriculum: a rethinking of the current New Zealand Curriculum.

On-going research of the early adopters of key competencies to record their evolution and innovative practice. To consider longitudinal studies on those students taught in these schools to collect evidence of the effect on them of developing their key competencies.

In this study, the key competencies may have a role in supporting mental health issues with young people, research on this hypothesis is suggested.

Finally, how valid are research projects in transferring innovative teacher practice and does the impact go beyond the researchers, participants and stakeholders that are involved in the study? How can research projects improve the quality of professional development and change teacher practice?
Recommendations
For teachers and school leadership.

1. Key competencies need to be acknowledged at a deeper level in schools’ leadership and with teachers, to comprehend their intention and potential for students.

2. To be braver, more urgent and innovative to achieve the purpose and vision of education, by preparing students for their future. To continue to challenge the status quo by thinking differently about teaching and learning and the relationship between the teacher and student.

3. Teachers need to have a voice and an impact on the direction of education both locally and nationally, using mentoring and collaboration across schools to transfer tacit knowledge from those with the expertise. To gather together the practitioners and the innovators to provide support, to open possibilities for the future in education and to allow them as a collective to be louder and more influential.

4. A shared understanding of key competencies amongst educators, communities and policymakers thus improving congruence. Therefore, the theory, practice and vision are aligned with answering the why, how and what is valued, measured and subsequently taught to young people. Perhaps the overcrowded curriculum is resolved.

5. Create a dissonance on the purpose of education, encourage individual teachers to identify their values and beliefs and how these relate to their practice.
For school leadership, and policy makers:

1. Key competencies to lead the New Zealand Curriculum. To initiate a review of the current categories and descriptions of the competencies, which may lead to a rethink of the curriculum with more emphasis and development of the front of the NZC.

2. To establish new systems that are multi-levelled to enact the changes needed. The systems to consider; the vision and purpose of education, professional development for understanding key competencies/dispositions or capabilities and innovative practices. Systems to engage educators and communities in rethinking teaching and learning beyond the culture of assessment and from National Standards, and finally, a system that enables the voice of the teacher to mean something. Any change comes with a warning to not simplify down concepts into checklists and packaged resources that dissipate the intent and nuisances of having the bigger picture and the longer view of education for young people and loses the strength of the relationship of the child in front of the teacher.

3. Is the goal to move education out of the hands of policymakers and into a separate governing board, by having a collaboration of diverse experts on young people such as educationists, cultural diversity, neuroscientists, child development specialists, practitioners, education researchers and students? The intention of an education board that is able to create policies for the long-term view of education in New Zealand so that it does not continue to be ‘pushed around by the political whims’ of current governments enabling policies to be implemented and derail good education practice.
In summary

The answer to whether key competencies can transform teaching and learning, the findings of this research would suggest, ‘YES.’ It appears that when teachers and schools have a vision that aligns with their thinking about the purpose of education, a paradigm shift occurs about how they see the relationship between teaching and learning. Then the learner and their needs in a changing dynamic world will be better met, enabling them to be, to live together, to know, to do, and to be active, healthy citizens. It is suggested that the key competencies enable this to occur when they are at the forefront of the curriculum, not just woven amongst the other areas. Perhaps hope is given for the reality to match ‘a necessary Utopia in which none of the talents hidden like buried treasure in every person is left untapped.’ (Delors, 1996, p. 48).

The final challenge from these participants is that education needs to change at a faster rate than its current ‘glacier speed’. For this we need to be braver and more innovative.

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” - Maya Angelou
REFERENCES


Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*: NYU Press.


Appendix A: Participant Information

Information for Participants

My name is Margo Thorpe I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Applied Practice degree at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this qualification.

**Research Project Title:** Teacher Stories: Competencies Leading Teaching and Learning

**The Aim:** To explore/examine the tensions and opportunities for teachers in implementing the New Zealand curriculum competencies.

**The Research Questions:**
1. How do teachers experienced describe the impact of the New Zealand Curriculum competencies on their practice?
2. What is the potential for competencies to be at the forefront of teaching and learning?
3. What are the tensions and challenges of placing competencies at the forefront of teaching and learning?

**What we are doing**
Currently New Zealand curriculum competencies and their potential to transform education is being widely advocated, both nationally and internationally. The research is about gathering stories from experienced teachers that are, or beginning to understand the deep complexities of competencies. They have seen how competencies can have an impact on students beyond traditional teaching and learning outcomes.

**What it will mean for you**
As a participant of this study you will be telling your story of the journey that lead to competencies impacting on your teaching and learning and what this now means for your practice. There are eight to ten participants
in this research project, there is an opportunity for you to meet with the other participants as a focus group, to further discuss the initial findings. The focus group is optional.

It will take about 1.5 -2 hours for the interview and another 2 hours for the focus group. The interview will take place at a location convenient for you and can be done using skype. The focus group will be held in a central location, the option to skype is available. You may decide to bring artefacts to support your story, these will be photographed by the researcher, the identity of the owner and school will be removed.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This does not stop you from changing your mind if you wish to withdraw from the project. However, because of the schedule, any withdrawals must be done up to two weeks after the return and confirmation of your verified transcript.

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected file and only you, the researcher and my supervisors will have access to this information. Please contact the researcher, Margo Thorpe thorpemargo@gmail.com if you need more information about the project. At any time if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact my supervisor: My supervisor is Dr Lisa Maurice-Takerei phone 815-4321 ext. 7338 or email lmauricetakerei@unitec.ac.nz  UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1070

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from September 2017 to September 2018. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: Teacher Stories: Competencies Leading Teaching and Learning

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this research project should I chose not to participate I can withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to two weeks after the return/confirmation of my verified transcript.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researchers and their supervisor. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 10 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed.

I understand that the interview will take between 1.5 - 2 hours, and the focus group if I attend about 2 hours.

I understand I can provide artefacts to support my stories and that these can be photographed, and that any evidence of identity will be removed.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: .......................................................... ..........................................

Participant Signature: .......................... Date: .......................... ..........................................

Project Researcher: .......................... Date: .......................... ..........................................

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: This study has been approved by the UNITEC 2017-1070
Research Ethics Committee from September 2017 to September 2018. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix C: Interview Questions

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INTERVIEW FOR GATHERING TEACHER STORIES

Title of Thesis: Teachers’ Stories: Competencies Leading Learning and Teaching
Researcher: Margo Thorpe

Teacher:
Date of Interview:

Setting the Scene:

1. Tell me about how you became to be a teacher.

2. Explain your understanding of what is the purpose of education?

3. Describe what is it like to be a teacher in the current education climate?

The Journey:

1. Talk me through your journey of your approach to the use of competencies in your teaching and learning.

2. What are the critical/turning points in your teaching career that has lead you to this current practice?

3. Tell me about the tensions and challenges you face to meet the potential of the competencies?

4. Can you explain why competencies have influenced your teaching and learning?
What’s Next:

1. What do you think needs to happen next in your journey using competencies?

2. How can we as a teaching profession use competencies to transform teaching and learning?

Thank you for taking the time to see me. Here are my contact details should you want to discuss anything further. I will get a transcript of this interview to you within two weeks for your approval. Margo Thorpe thorpemargo@gmail.com
Full name of author: ..........Margo Ann Thorpe

ORCID number (Optional): ..................................................

Full title of thesis/dissertation/research project ('the work'):

KEY COMPETENCIES LEADING TEACHING AND LEARNING:

IMAGINING NEW POSSIBILITIES IN EDUCATION

Practice Pathway: CISC9090..............................................................................................................

Degree: ..Masters of Applied Practice................................................................................................

Year of presentation: ..........2019..........

Principal Supervisor: Dr Jo Mane

Associate Supervisor: Hayo Reinders.................

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permission for such material to be made accessible worldwide via the Internet.

_______________________________

Signature of author: .................. ..............................................

Date: ...06. /...03...../......2019...
Declaration

Name of candidate: Margo Thorpe

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: Key Competencies Leading Teaching and Learning: Imagining New Possibilities in Education

is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Applied Practice.

Principal Supervisor: Dr Jo Mane

Associate Supervisor/s: Hayo Reinders

Candidate’s declaration

I confirm that:

• This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
• The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
• Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2017-1070

Candidate Signature: ……………………………………… Date: 3/3/19

Student number: 1459668