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# **HELP OR HINDRANCE:**

**The image of 'Self as Teacher' Held By New Zealand First Year  
Teachers**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of**

**Master of Education**

**at Massey University,  
Palmerston North,  
New Zealand.**

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**2002**

## ABSTRACT

This study pioneers research into the 'self as teacher' image of New Zealand first year teachers. A personal narrative approach allowed the researcher to explore: how New Zealand first year teachers metaphorically perceive 'self as teacher' image; the events, situations, and issues that these teachers feel enhance, challenge, or undermine initial 'self as teacher' image; and the role 'self as teacher' image plays in the professional development of New Zealand first year teachers. The implications of the above for preservice and inservice providers of teacher education are discussed.

The study demonstrates that 'self as teacher' image is not constant, it is shifting and complex. The research indicates that the metaphors first year teachers use to define 'self as teacher' images are indicative of their professional development stage. Although first year teachers must come to terms with a complex array of factors as they interact within the wider school context, if they have been adequately prepared and are sufficiently supported during the first year of teaching, they will professionally grow and meet the challenges. If first year teachers are supported they can develop a patchwork of metaphors defining 'self as teacher' image that appropriately informs their practice so they can accommodate to the particular context in which they need to operate. The research indicates that preservice and inservice teacher educators need to assist beginning teachers to identify and examine 'self as teacher' image and take ownership of their professional development so they can be the author of the teacher they are becoming.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most individual endeavours of significance have been aided and supported in various ways by others, the completion of this thesis is no exception. My sincere thanks to Ms. Sue Watson, my main supervisor. Sue has provided expert guidance and support and has ensured that this thesis has met the highest standards of academic rigour. I greatly appreciate the way Sue made herself available, provided a listening ear, and willingly responded to all my queries. Thank you Sue.

Thank you to Mrs. Barbara Russell, my second supervisor, for her support and help with final editing. Thank you Barbara.

I acknowledge the assistance of a grant given by the Post-Graduate Research Fund Committee that was used to pay to have some of the interview tapes transcribed. I thank Anne Moretti for a thoroughly professional job in carrying out the latter.

I am indebted to the first year teachers who made this research possible. Thank you for your willingness to give of your time and to share your stories with me. I thank you for your sincerity and for the trust you placed in me when revealing, what in some cases, you had not revealed to anyone else. I shall always value the time we spent together.

To my sons, Mark and Shane, and daughter-in-laws, Virginia and Ngaire, thank you for your support in a myriad of ways.

Finally I acknowledge the support and assistance of my husband, Murray. Thank you for sharing the highs and lows, lending an interested ear, trying to lighten my load in other areas, and for just being there.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

New Zealand teachers and schools generally are becoming increasingly subjected to intense scrutiny by society. Calls for teacher accountability are strongly voiced by politicians, members of the business sector, and parents. Teachers are expected to perform to meet the growing range of demands placed on them by society generally and also to cater for the individual needs of their pupils. Teachers must carry out their work in contexts that are the result of social, historical, and political influences. If New Zealand is to produce teachers who are effective in enabling pupils to develop the knowledge and skills to equip them to become life-long learners and so be able to adapt to a changing world, then serious consideration needs to be accorded to the teachers themselves. In order to effectively interact with, and facilitate the learning of others, teachers must first understand themselves - what has shaped and positioned them to be as they are. Knowledge of 'self as teacher' images held by teachers generally, and first year teachers specifically, and the factors that influence the construction and reconstruction of these, has considerable potential to assist the personal and professional development of New Zealand teachers. The latter will better equip teachers to operate effectively in the context of New Zealand schools.

#### **The Voice of First Year Teachers**

The 'self as teacher' images New Zealand first year teachers hold cannot be revealed and understood through questionnaires and highly structured interviews. These teachers need to be provided with the opportunity to tell their stories. Harvey (1989, p. 48) argues that "...all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate". New Zealand first year teachers, as individuals, and as a group, need to have their voices heard, accepted and legitimised. This study goes some way towards making the voices of New Zealand first year teachers audible.

## **Narrative Unity**

Throughout the writings of this thesis personal narrative is presented as being of considerable importance, both as a way individuals make sense of their experiences and as a tool for revealing how people are shaped and positioned in particular ways. The assumption is that the person we are, our sense of 'self', is an integration of past and present experiences in social and historical contexts. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) posit that we develop a narrative unity from our ongoing life experiences out of which images are created. Narrative unity, according to Connelly and Clandinin is:

*...a continuum within a person's experience that renders life experiences meaningful through the unity they achieve for the person. What we mean by unity is the union in each of us in a particular place and time of all we have been and undergone in the past and in the tradition (the history and culture) that helped shape us. It is a meaning-giving account, an interpretation, of our history and, as such, provides a way of understanding our experiential knowledge. Within each of us there are a number of narrative unities. Ongoing life experiences create the narrative unity out of which images are crystallized and formed when called on by practical situations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, pp. 74—75).*

## **Image**

As this study is focused on the development of 'self as teacher' image of first year teachers a description of what is meant by the term 'image' in this context is provided. An image is an idea or mental representation. An image is a conception with a visually physical connotation and has metaphorical potential (Weber & Mitchell, 1996). Images, according to Weber and Mitchell, are constructed and interpreted in attempts to make sense of our experiences and to communicate that sense to others. Images are subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation.

Bullough (1991) suggests that images are reflected in metaphors and as such are both the building blocks of thinking schemata and filters through which teachers unconsciously assess pedagogical knowledge. Clandinin (1985) encapsulates

beautifully the notion of image as it is applied in the context of this study. Clandinin (1985) defines image as:

*...a kind of knowledge, embodied in a person and connected with the individual's past, present, and future. Image draws both the present and future into a personally meaningful nexus of experience focused on the immediate situation, which called it forth. It reaches into the past, gathering up experimental threads meaningfully connected to the present. And it reaches intentionally into the future and creates new meaningfully connected threads as situations are experienced, and new situations anticipated from the perspective of the image. Image is the glue that melds together a person's diverse experiences, both personal and professional (p.379).*

### **Organisation of the Thesis**

Chapter Two, reviews current literature relevant to the context of this study. Contentions of writers, mainly based on research from outside New Zealand, regarding the importance of 'self' and particularly 'self as teacher' in the professional development of teachers generally and first year teachers specifically are presented.

The methodology and design framework for the research is presented in Chapter Three. Discussion of, and justification for, the appropriateness of narrative inquiry and the issues of validity and reliability associated with the use of this approach are addressed. Details regarding the selection and composition of the people in the sample are provided, along with ethical considerations that were necessary in undertaking this research. Chapter Three also describes and outlines the process of data collection and analysis involved in the carrying out of this research.

In order to manage and organise the overwhelming amount of material relevant to the particular objectives of the study, the results have been presented in three chapters, each addressing a major theme. As will be described in the methodology chapter, some results have been presented graphically to provide an indication of

frequency of occurrence of various factors. These graphic representations are referred to, elaborated on, and examples from the teachers' narrative transcripts are incorporated as evidence. All material for the results chapters arise directly from the transcripts of the participants' narratives.

The first results chapter, Chapter Four, presents the initial 'self as teacher' images the first year teachers in this study held. It provides an overview of the metaphors these teachers used to define how they perceived themselves as teachers before beginning their first year of classroom teaching. Chapter Five reports the results on the factors, events and situations that the teachers in the study perceived had enhanced, confirmed, challenged, or shattered their initial 'self as teacher' image. The final results chapter, Chapter Six, presents the 'self as teacher' images that were emerging, evolving, as the first year teachers in the study encountered the various experiences of their first year of teaching. The metaphors the teachers employed to define their evolving 'self as teacher' images are presented.

An analysis and discussion drawing together the themes and key points rising from the result is the focus of Chapter Seven. Links to findings from other research in this field, mainly from outside New Zealand, are made. The content of this chapter adds new dimensions to current knowledge concerning the understanding of the professional development of New Zealand first year teachers. Commentary includes discussion of how the results of this study indicate the major role personal history plays in the construction of 'self as teacher' which in turn greatly influences the professional behaviour and development of first year teachers in New Zealand. A conceptualisation is presented of how the results of this study demonstrate the development of 'self as teacher', expressed metaphorically, prior to and during preservice training and into the first year of teaching and beyond, is pivotal in the effective professional development of New Zealand first year teachers and teachers generally.

Implications of, and recommendations as a result of, the outcomes of this research are outlined in Chapter Eight. Suggestions for ongoing or further research are forwarded. A concluding statement, voicing the success of the research in meeting

not only the objectives of the study but in extending the knowledge about the subject of the study concerning New Zealand first year teachers, their image of 'self as teacher' and their professional development is made.