

Copyright is owned by the Author of this thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.



**MOMENTS OF CLARITY: A STUDY OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS'  
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
EXPERIENCES AND THE  
TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS OF  
CHANGE IN SELF-EFFICACY  
DEVELOPMENT**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctor of Education

at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand.

Bridget Marie Percy

2017



## **Abstract**

This qualitative longitudinal study sought to understand ‘aha’ moments experienced by a group of early career higher education teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand and the role those moments played in the transformational process of change in teacher self-efficacy development. Self-efficacy theory was foregrounded throughout the study, transformation theory provided an established framework to understand the process of transformation, and the notion of threshold concepts was used to conceptualise the ‘aha’ moment and name potential teaching threshold concepts.

Aotearoa New Zealand specific teacher self-efficacy studies are important because studies in other contexts have shown self-efficacy is a predictor of teacher motivation, resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties and self-efficacy is linked to successful student achievement. In understanding the relationship between ‘aha’ moments and how these contribute to teacher self-efficacy development, there is the potential for professional learning opportunities that support self-efficacy promotion.

Eleven early career teachers shared their experiences of ‘aha’ moments and their interpretation of the role these played in their teacher self-efficacy development. This research found that ‘aha’ moments were personal learning realisations that contributed to change in teacher self-efficacy and that the transformational development of teacher self-efficacy can be understood as a process containing four distinct phases.

Furthermore, the transformative ‘aha’ moments, and in particular those that constituted a teaching specific potential threshold concept, provided teachers with an enhanced awareness of teaching capability. Finally, mastery experiences (successful and unsuccessful) were the most commonly described source of efficacy information related to the teachers’ ‘aha’ moments.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the teachers who participated in this study. I have gained a strong appreciation for what they experienced and I feel humbled and privileged to have been trusted with their stories. These teachers have very much been a part of my own professional learning journey.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Margaret Hartnett and Associate Professor Nick Zepke. Together they have been a constant source of support and critique throughout this research, pushing me to think harder with “you are not quite there yet”.

Finally, to my husband Cameron, my sons Mathew and Christopher and my mother Patricia, I would like to thank you for giving me the time and space I needed to allow those thoughts to come to life. Your endless love and support has allowed me to complete this research.

# Table of Contents

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Abstract</b> .....                                 | <b>i</b>   |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b> .....                         | <b>ii</b>  |
| <b>Table of Contents</b> .....                        | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>List of Tables</b> .....                           | <b>vi</b>  |
| <b>List of Figures</b> .....                          | <b>vii</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY</b> .....   | <b>1</b>   |
| 1.1 Introduction .....                                | 1          |
| 1.2 Research aims of the study .....                  | 6          |
| 1.3 Rationale for the study .....                     | 7          |
| 1.4 Context of the study .....                        | 8          |
| 1.5 How I came to this research .....                 | 8          |
| 1.6 Thesis overview.....                              | 9          |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....           | <b>11</b>  |
| 2.1 Introduction .....                                | 11         |
| 2.2 Self-efficacy .....                               | 13         |
| 2.3 Threshold concepts.....                           | 34         |
| 2.4 Transformation theory.....                        | 46         |
| 2.5 Gaps in the literature .....                      | 50         |
| 2.6 Chapter summary .....                             | 53         |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY &amp; METHODS</b> ..... | <b>55</b>  |
| 3.1 Introduction .....                                | 55         |
| 3.2 Research questions .....                          | 55         |
| 3.3 Research framework.....                           | 56         |
| 3.4 Methods.....                                      | 61         |
| 3.5 Ensuring quality .....                            | 67         |
| 3.6 Sampling.....                                     | 71         |
| 3.7 Context of the study .....                        | 72         |
| 3.8 Research ethics .....                             | 72         |
| 3.9 Research procedures.....                          | 74         |
| 3.10 Data collection.....                             | 76         |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 3.11 Data analysis .....   | 77         |
| 3.12 Chapter summary .....   | 83         |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR: CASE SUMMARIES.....</b>   | <b>84</b>  |
| 4.1 Introduction .....   | 84         |
| 4.2 ‘Aha’ moments and self-efficacy information .....  | 85         |
| 4.3 Case studies .....   | 86         |
| 4.4 Case summary .....   | 113        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE: CROSS CASE FINDINGS.....</b>  | <b>117</b> |
| 5.1 Introduction .....   | 117        |
| 5.2 Teachers’ perception of teacher self-efficacy .....  | 118        |
| 5.3 ‘Aha’ moments and change in teacher self-efficacy .....  | 123        |
| 5.4 The properties of ‘aha’ moments and the relationship to self-efficacy.....   | 131        |
| 5.5 ‘Aha’ moments and teacher knowledge and pedagogy.....  | 148        |
| 5.6 Chapter Summary.....   | 160        |
| <b>CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION.....</b>  | <b>162</b> |
| 6.1 Introduction .....   | 162        |
| 6.2 ‘Aha’ moments were personal professional learning realisations that<br>contributed to change in teacher self-efficacy..... | 163        |
| 6.3 A common transformational process of teacher self-efficacy contained<br>four distinct phases.....                          | 172        |
| 6.4 Potential threshold concept-related ‘aha’ moments provided teachers<br>with enhanced awareness of teaching capability..... | 184        |
| 6.5 Mastery experiences were the most common source of efficacy<br>information related to ‘aha’ moments .....                  | 194        |
| 6.6 The cultural setting has the potential to influence self-efficacy.....   | 195        |
| 6.7 Chapter summary .....  | 196        |
| <b>CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>   | <b>197</b> |
| 7.1 Introduction .....   | 197        |
| 7.2 Research conclusions .....   | 197        |
| 7.3 Contributions to knowledge .....   | 199        |
| 7.4 Implications for practice.....   | 203        |
| 7.5 Future research .....  | 206        |
| 7.6 Limitations .....  | 207        |



|   |            |
|---|------------|
| 7.7 Personal response to the research.....  | 208        |
| <b>References .....</b>   | <b>210</b> |
| <b>APPENDICES .....</b>   | <b>223</b> |
| Appendix 1: Letter requesting access to an institution.....   | 223        |
| Appendix 2: Advertisement email & Information sheet .....   | 225        |
| Appendix 3: Email to Study Participants 1 .....   | 228        |
| Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form .....  | 229        |
| Appendix 5: Interview guide 1 .....   | 231        |
| Appendix 6: Interview guide 2.....  | 234        |
| Appendix 7: Interview guide 3.....  | 236        |
| Appendix 8: Interview guide 4.....  | 239        |
| Appendix 9: Interview guide 5.....  | 241        |
| Appendix 10: Interview guide 6.....   | 243        |
| Appendix 11: Reflective Journal Prompts.....  | 244        |
| Appendix 12: Transcriber’s Confidentiality Agreement.....   | 245        |
| Appendix 13: Participant email.....   | 247        |
| Appendix 14: Authority for the Release of Transcripts, Reflective Journal<br>Entries and Visual Representations ..... | 248        |
| Appendix 15: Interview Notes .....  | 250        |
| Appendix 16: Example of NVivo coding nodes .....  | 251        |
| Appendix 17: Cate Visual Representation 6 .....   | 252        |
| Appendix 18: Eddy Visual Representation 6 .....   | 252        |
| Appendix 19: Eddy Visual Representation 2 .....   | 253        |
| Appendix 20: Jon Visual Representation 6 .....  | 253        |
| Appendix 21: Grace Visual Representation 6 .....  | 254        |
| Appendix 22: Grace Visual Representation 1 .....  | 254        |
| Appendix 23: Tame Visual Representation 6.....  | 255        |
| Appendix 24: Aroha Visual Representation 6.....   | 255        |
| Appendix 25: Aroha Reflective Journal.....  | 256        |
| Appendix 26: Liz Visual Representation 6 .....  | 256        |
| Appendix 27: Anne Reflective Journal .....  | 257        |
| Appendix 28: Matt Visual Representation 6 .....   | 257        |
| Appendix 29: Tame Visual Representation 1.....  | 258        |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Appendix 30: Eddy Reflective Journal 3 .....     | 258 |
| Appendix 31: Grace Reflective Journal 3 .....    | 259 |
| Appendix 32: Tame Visual Representation 2 .....  | 259 |
| Appendix 33: Sarah Visual Representation 2 ..... | 260 |
| Appendix 34: Cate Visual Representation 2 .....  | 260 |
| Appendix 35: Aaron Visual Representation 2.....  | 261 |
| Appendix 36: Aaron Reflective Journal 1 .....    | 261 |
| Appendix 37: Aroha Visual Representation 1.....  | 262 |
| Appendix 38: Liz Visual Representation 1 .....   | 262 |
| Appendix 39: Anne Visual Representation 6.....   | 263 |
| Appendix 40: Anne Visual Representation 1 .....  | 263 |
| Appendix 41: Grace Visual Representation 2 ..... | 264 |
| Appendix 42: Liz Visual Representation 2 .....   | 264 |
| Appendix 43: Anne Visual Representation 2.....   | 265 |
| Appendix 44: Aroha Visual Representation 2.....  | 265 |

## List of Tables

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table 4.1. Summary of teachers' 'aha' moments with source(s) of self-efficacy information.....                    | 116 |
| Table 5.1. Summary of teachers' capability evaluations of teacher self-efficacy and features of each group .....  | 124 |
| Table 5.2. The teachers' interpretations of change to their teacher self-efficacy related to an 'aha' moment..... | 132 |
| Table 5.3. Summary of the phases of 'aha' moments and the common features.....                                    | 145 |
| Table 5.4. Summary of 'aha' moments and teachers' changed or modified knowledge and pedagogy .....                | 158 |

## List of Figures

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure 6.1. Diagrammatic representation of the transformational process of self-efficacy development..... | 173 |
|---|-----|

