Associate Teachers in New Zealand:

Great Expectations

Helen Trevethan

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Education

At the University of Otago

Dunedin, New Zealand

December 2013

ABSTRACT

Practicum is the cornerstone of teacher education. This research is set in the New Zealand context and explores understandings of the practicum from the perspective of associate teachers in the primary school sector. Much has been written from the perspective of the student teacher and there is a body of work about how the associate teacher role should be enacted but the voices of associate teachers are under-represented in the literature. The aim of this qualitative research is to investigate the experiences and meaning making of individual associate teachers, in order to inform understandings of the practicum context.

The research sits within a sociocultural framework in acknowledgement of the situated nature and interconnectedness of human experience. Using that lens, I view associate teachers as situated members of communities of practice and explore the influences that inform their understandings of their role. This case study is designed as an aid to understanding the ways associate teachers conceptualise their role via data from interviews at the beginning and the end of a year, on-line postings, and field notes. The process of data analysis was informed by grounded theory and was both inductive and deductive.

The study participants were twelve associate teachers who taught in the same school. During the first half of the year teachers were part of a school-wide professional development programme focussed on the role of the associate teacher, facilitated through readings and on-line discussion. In the second part of the year they were supported to identify and implement an independent learning experience of their choice. Their projects were focussed on: improving feedback for student teachers, classroom pedagogy and the professional dispositions of the associate teacher. The realities of the associate teacher role were investigated through their experiences during the research study.

The findings indicate that associate teachers in this study see their role in idiosyncratic ways. The teachers constructed their associate teacher identities based on their own prior experiences in the absence of any significant support from the initial teacher education provider to move into that role. The perceptions presented by the associate teachers suggested a preoccupation with forming positive relationships and giving feedback rather than acting educative mentors.

The study illuminates the likelihood that professional experiences for student teachers will become fragmented unless there is effective communication and mutual respect between the teachers who work with student teachers in schools, and initial teacher education providers. The thesis outlines possible ways to improve practicum experiences.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother - Winifred Agnes Trevethan.

You are so much more than a mother to us.

and

In loving memory of the Dunedin College of Education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to my supervisors, Anne and Greg. I have been truly blessed by your speedy responses to my worries, your wisdom and your generosity of spirit. You believed in me when I was doubtful.

Thank you to the teachers who shared their thoughts with me. I hope that I have highlighted the importance of the work that you do.

This thesis is also dedicated to the wonderful student teachers that I have had the privilege to know over my years as a teacher educator. I have learned so much from you all.

A myriad of people have supported and had faith in me - too many to list for fear of missing some. So many of my colleagues and friends have offered words of encouragement and have helped in various ways. You know who you are and I am so grateful. Special thanks must go to my family for their patience and unwavering confidence that I could do this. Arohanui.

Special thanks to Gill for being an inspirational role model and friend.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

It is an interesting time to be a teacher educator in New Zealand as teacher education continues to be impacted by shifting political priorities. This has resulted in widespread changes to the content and configuration of programmes, modes of delivery, staffing, funding, and to the whole culture of teacher education (Davey, 2013; Smith & Tinning, 2011). Research is telling us that we need to be preparing people for teaching who are 'adaptive experts". Timperley (2013) suggests that adaptive experts are:

> driven by a moral imperative to promote the engagement, learning, and well-being of *each* of their students. To achieve these outcomes, adaptive experts know they must recognise the assumptions (including cultural positioning) that underpin their practice, when these assumptions are getting in the way, and when to let them go. Adaptive experts actively seek in-depth knowledge about the content of learning and how to teach it effectively to their particular students in their specific context. (p. 5)

Teachers of the future need to have the skills and dispositions to adapt to change and innovation (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012). Twenty-first century teachers will need to be reflective, responsive, resourceful, and able to work alongside children in learning environments which are focussed on building knowledge together. Timperley (2013) suggest that teachers should be as adaptive experts who are willing and able to examine the assumptions which underpin their practices and to find ways to achieve positive outcomes for each member of their class. As teacher educators we must be mindful of the importance of our role in supporting student teachers to be able to move into the profession ready to meet the uncertainties of the future with open minds.

I have been a teacher educator since 1993, originally employed by a College of Education and now, as a result of merger, by a University. Amid the turmoil of the merger, which brought staff redundancies and years of programme development and re-development, I have had to think about what I consider to be the essence of teacher education. I believe that the practicum is the heart of teacher education. It is what makes a teacher education degree programme different from academic degrees and similar to professional degrees such as nursing and physiotherapy (Timperley, 2013).

Practicum is one of the terms used for professional practice, the component of teacher education where a student teacher is based in a classroom, which has long been accepted as an essential component of learning to be a teacher (Anderson, 2007; Kemmis & Ahern, 2011; Lind, 2004; Simpson, Hastings & Hill, 2007; Zeichner, 2002), yet is poorly understood (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012). In the practicum literature, terminology is significant and changes over time (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Some alternative names for the school-based component of teacher education are "professional experience" (Ingvarson, Beavis, Kleinhenz & Elliott, 2004), "field experience" (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Rorrison, 2008), and "clinical experience" (LePage, Darling-Hammond, & Akar, 2005). Each of these terms has different connotations for how practicum is perceived.

Practicum

Practicum has been described as the "glue" for teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2006) and can be seen as a defining feature of the quality of teacher education programmes (Haigh, Ell & Mackisack, 2013). Practicum is highly valued by those who are learning to teach (Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005; Roland & Beckford, 2010; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005) and makes a significant contribution to learning about being a teacher (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Rajuan, Beijaard & Verloop, 2007). High student teacher expectations and assessment considerations mean that practicum can be challenging and emotional for student teachers (Hastings, 2004; Murray-Harvey et al., 2000), who may be torn between excitement about the opportunity to work in the field and fear of failure (Hascher, Cocard & Moser, 2004; Koerner & Rust, 2002). Practicum manifests in different ways depending on the length of time student teachers spend in school, the timing of the practicum, the frequency of school placements, assessment procedures, and the way it is linked to the rest of the teacher education programme (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Kemmis & Ahern, 2011). At the time of writing, 96% of teacher education students in New Zealand are studying at one of the six main universities (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013). The change from Colleges of Education to Universities as providers of initial teacher education in New Zealand has resulted in consolidation and reduction in practicum because of the need to fit into University structures and the impact of University financial priorities and budgets (Ell, 2011).

Internationally there has been a move 'back to the future' towards school-based teacher education (Grudnoff & Williams, 2010; Koster, Kortagen & Wubbels, 1998; Smith, Hodson

& Brown, 2013). This trend is apparent in England (Hodson, Smith & Brown, 2012; Maynard, 2001; Smith, Hodson & Brown, 2013) and there are signs of similar changes in Australia (Toomey et al., 2005). One model which has recently been implemented in New Zealand is a school-based teacher education programme *Teach First NZ*, where teacher education is undertaken on the job while in paid employment as a teacher.

This research is specifically focused on primary teacher education in New Zealand where, like many other countries, the dominant model for teaching practice is the "triad" (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman & Stevens, 2009; Slick, 1998; Smith, 2007; Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009). The traditional triadic model has three members; a student teacher, hosted by an associate teacher (also known as a cooperating, supervisor, or mentor teacher), visited by a staff member (supervisor, faculty advisor) from the initial teacher education provider institution (Grudnoff & Williams, 2010; Rodgers & Keil, 2007; Zeichner, 2002). In triadic practicum settings student teachers are placed in classes for various periods of time and are usually hosted by one associate teacher who is also responsible for teaching a class of children. Traditionally, a visiting staff member from the initial teacher education provider visits the classroom to observe a student teacher working with children.

The student teacher

At the present time most initial teacher education providers in New Zealand offer both undergraduate and graduate primary teacher education programmes (Ell, 2011), although there are indications that this may not be the case in the future. In 2010 The New Zealand Ministry of Education published a consultation document, *A Vision for the Teaching Profession,* which contains a suggestion from the New Zealand Government that primary teacher education should become a post-graduate qualification in common with many other countries such as Finland, Germany and France (O'Neill, 2012). Political events and changes to funding priorities impacted on this initiative (Ell, & Grudnoff, 2013), but the New Zealand government is now funding some trial initial teacher education programmes at masters level to be delivered from 2014.

Currently, undergraduate primary teacher education programmes offered in universities have the same academic entry level criteria as other first year university programmes, while

primary graduate diploma applicants require a degree or degree equivalent to be considered for selection. Interviews are part of the selection process for all candidates for teacher education programmes.

Visiting lecturer

The person who represents the initial teacher education provider in the practicum triad may be variously known as "observing lecturer" (White, 2009) "university supervisor" (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Koerner & Rust, 2002) or "visiting lecturer" (Haigh, 2001; Lind, 2004). For the purposes of this study the term used will be "visiting lecturer". The visiting lecturer has a pivotal role in the practicum setting (Beck & Kosnik, 2002c; Haigh & Ward, 2004), which usually entails visiting student teachers when they are on school placement, observing them teaching, and providing feedback. Kane (2005) reported that in New Zealand, student teachers were visited "at least once by an institution lecturer or tutor during each practicum" (p. 162). In 2010 the New Zealand Teachers' Council set regulations for the minimum number of practicum visits by visiting lecturers in primary teacher education programmes. Currently the requirement for 3 and 4-year programmes is:

> that a student teacher will be visited on a number of occasions in the first two years of a 3 year programme, and the first three years of a 4 year programme, to observe the student teacher teaching and across transitions in the programme/day routines. In the final year of the programme there will normally be visits of a longer period of time, on at least three occasions. (p.15)

For one year programmes:

> The Council's requirements are that a student teacher will normally be visited on at least three occasions in the programme, to observe the student teacher teaching and across transitions in the programme/day routines. (New Zealand Teachers' Council, 2010, p.16)

Traditionally, the visiting lecturer was a staff member who taught in the teacher education programme (Rodgers & Keil, 2007; Zeichner, 2006). Beck and Kosnik (2002b) report that that is no longer the case in Canada, as many initial teacher education providers give this role to "specially appointed supervisory staff, typically doctoral students, retired teachers, teachers on leave from their school boards, or retired education professors" (p. 6), because of a lack of time among university faculty, and research as a university priority over practicum supervision. The research literature suggests that effective teacher education programmes

feature cohesion between members of the practicum triad (Beck & Kosnik, 2002, Hoban, 2006). When visiting staff are people who teach in the programme, there are greater opportunities for creating and sustaining links and a common language between school and the initial teacher education provider (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010).

In a comparative study between an Australian and a Canadian University, Mitchell, Clarke and Nuttall (2007) outlined concerns from teachers who work with student teachers in both countries about the role of the university in the practicum. Their study indicated that this role had been diminished in the Australian university because of the cost of visiting student teachers and changes to university priorities which have emphasise research rather than practicum visiting. There is also disquiet in New Zealand about the credibility of those who are designated to visit student teachers when they are in schools (Cameron, 2007; McGee, Cowie & Cooper, 2010). The New Zealand Teachers Council now requires that student teachers must be visited by staff members who teach in their programme and who are registered teachers, in an endeavor to improve the alignment of understandings between initial teacher education providers and schools (Ell, 2011).

The Associate Teacher

The remaining member of the practicum triad in primary teacher education is generally known in New Zealand as the "associate teacher". These are classroom teachers whose work involves teaching children and also hosting student teachers. In New Zealand, associate teachers who work in primary schools are paid a daily rate for each day that a student teacher is in their classroom, unless they are employed in a 'Normal' school.

The term 'Normal School' comes from the French '*ecoles normale*' and refers to a group of schools in France in the 16th century which were used to train teachers and were called 'normale' in order to emphasise that they were real schools where children were taught in the normal way.

In New Zealand Normal Schools also have a dual focus: providing education for children and supporting initial teacher education (McGee, 2001). The first of these schools was set up in the 1870s and they were originally schools which included a teacher training department.

From 1909 onwards Colleges of Education were established and normal schools provided practicum experiences for student teachers, in the expectation that they would be modeling "consistently best practice" (Julian, 1997, p. v). Teachers in those schools have a Normal School allowance built into their annual salary by the Ministry of Education rather than being paid by the initial teacher education provider for each student teacher they host, as is the case for associate teachers in other primary schools.

Practicum Tensions

Practicum experiences can be positive for all (Hastings, 2004). On the other hand there have been, and continue to be, widespread concerns about how to provide consistently high quality practicum experiences for student teachers (Le Cornu, 2010; Wilson, 2006). Practicum has been described as a problem (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008) and even a "wicked problem" (Southgate, Reynolds & Howley, 2103). It is a setting in which tensions, communication difficulties, and confusion flourish (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008).

Educative Value

There are questions about the educative value of the practicum and suggestions that practicum is "haphazard" (Darling Hammond, 2006; Torrez & Krebs, 2012). Much is assumed in the practicum (Grundy, Robison & Tomazos, 2001) and misunderstanding is described by Allen, Butler-Mader and Smith (2010) as the "norm rather than the exception" (p. 618). Vick (2006) outlined the history of practicum problems in Australia and England and concluded that many of the problems of practicum are enduring and deeply ingrained in the practicum context. Practicum is also cause for concern in New Zealand and there are calls for change (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Grudnoff, 2011; Grudnoff & Williams, 2010; Harlow, Cooper & Cowie, 2012; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2010; Timperley, 2013). Disquiet is growing, in part because practicum protocols have changed very little over time despite changes to the other aspects of teacher education programmes (Grudnoff & Williams, 2010). It is increasingly apparent that simply being in a school on practicum is not sufficient for effective student teacher learning (Grudnoff, 2011).

"The gap"

The practicum is the point of connection for the members of the triad but it is questionable to what degree it operates as a setting for learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). Although practicum appears to be a social structure, there are suggestions that each member of the practicum triad operates in isolation within their own environment. In many cases practicum visits are the only point of connection between the associate teacher and the visiting lecturer, with the student teacher as the common denominator who is effectively straddling both worlds as illustrated in Figure 1.
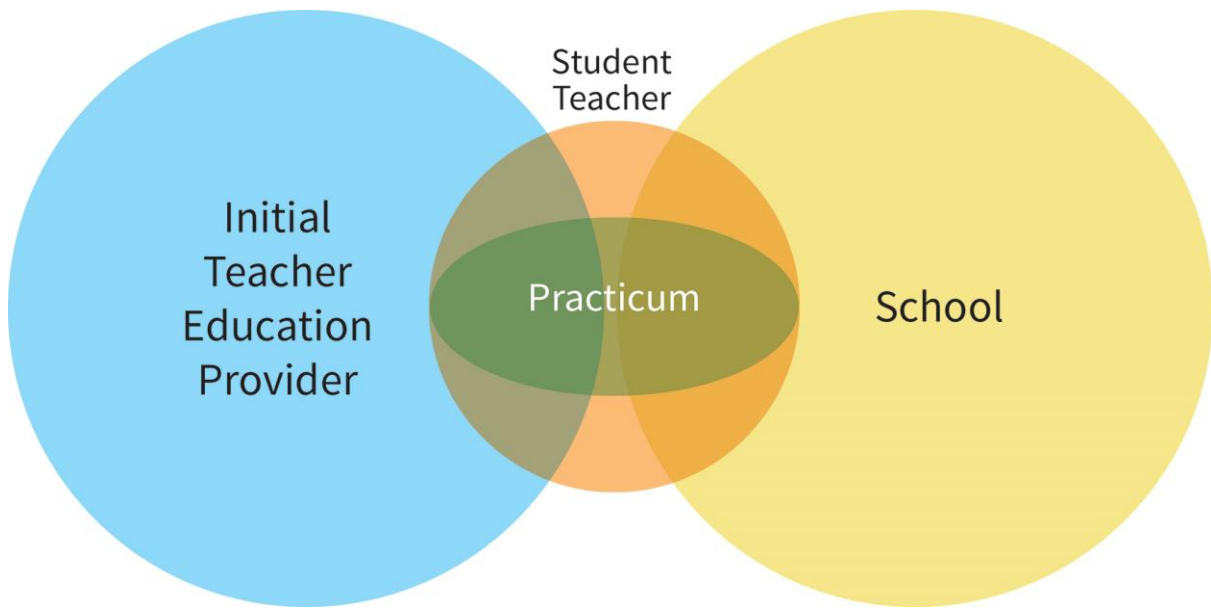
Figure 1.   **Practicum gap**

This "gap" between teacher education providers and schools is at the heart of many practicum problems (Koc, Peker & Osmanoglu, 2009; McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins, 2007; Ramsay, 2000; Van Nuland, 2011). Implicit in initial teacher education programmes is an assumption that the knowledge and practices which are taught there will transfer to the classroom (Allen et al., 2010), and yet in many cases it seems that practicum experiences are not connected to the other aspects of teacher preparation programmes (Graham, 2006; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012). The gap can also be conceptualised as a difference in priorities. Grudnoff and Tuck (2003) suggest that there may be a difference in emphasis and expectation between schools where craft knowledge is valued and initial teacher education providers where the value of critical intervention is emphasised.

Teacher education programmes which feature shared beliefs and common knowledge between participants, and coherence between course work and school-based learning experiences are

the ideal (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a; Darling Hammond, 2006; Kane, 2007). Lack of shared understanding between initial teacher education providers and the classroom is a problem. Links across the programme are essential for student teachers to be able to make the connections that they need to learn about the complexities of teaching (Hoban, 2006). In their Hong Kong based study, Tang, Wong and Cheng (2012) gave a specific example and suggested that a constructivist teacher learning environment needs to feature in both coursework and in the field in order that students can capitalise on learning opportunities and make links across the settings.

Differences in expectations and role confusion among triad members result in teacher education programmes which are not cohesive (Zeichner, 2002). Fragmentation and tensions arise from the way each aspect of teacher education is perceived and the status each is given by student teachers (Nielsen, Triggs, Clarke, & Collins, 2010). The theory-practice gap is often discussed in the practicum literature, and use of the term generally positions "theory" as the "broad range of concepts and skills associated with the declarative and procedural knowledge" provided on campus, and "practice" as the "classroom pedagogy and activities" which occur in the school (Allen, Ambrosetti & Turner, 2013, p. 109). There are suggestions that some teacher education programmes are seen as too theoretical (Grudnoff & Williams, 2010; Hagger, Burn, Mutton & Brindley, 2008) and that instructional programmes at provider institutions are considered too idealistic (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson & Fry, 2004). Some teachers in schools regard the staff at provider institutions as out of touch with reality and preoccupied with theory at the expense of practice (Russell & Chapman, 2001; Toomey et al., 2005).

Lack of cohesion in initial teacher education programmes has been well documented over a long period in New Zealand. Battersby and Ramsay (1990) wrote that:

> Trainees have developed a mind-set which places theory in one compartment and practice in another. The structure of the Teachers' Colleges, the patterning of school-based experiences and the nature of those experiences, the nature of the knowledge presented within teachers' college courses, and an emphasis on a non-critical and non-reflective approach to in-school training all reinforce the dichotomy between theory and practice. (p. 26)

Julian (1998) also found that there was little agreement about the purpose of practicum. Grudnoff and Tuck (2003) described differences of opinion about the purpose of teacher

education between schools and pre-service providers as a "mismatch between preparation and practice" (p. 35).

Student teacher learning is compromised when they are caught in the middle of conflicting messages from initial teacher education providers and schools (Cheng, 2010; Flessner, 2012; Hascher et al., 2004; Hayes, 2001). This is exacerbated by power imbalances in the hierarchical practicum triad (Le Cornu, 2010) in which student teachers are traditionally the junior partner. Because of the assessment implications of practicum, student teachers may become stressed and anxious (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000) as they try to negotiate contradictory messages from initial teacher education providers and associate teachers to meet the demands of both parties (Bullough & Draper, 2007; Fantozzi, 2012; Haigh & Tuck, 1999; Smagorinsky et al., 2004). In many cases student teachers have few choices and little significant support in the field except from the associate teacher who is hosting them in their class.

Research Questions

In my daily work visiting and placing student teachers in schools, I am continually reminded of the important work that associate teachers do, and of the impact of their practices on student teacher learning. I am amazed at the variety of ways that the associate teacher role is interpreted and the influence that can have on student teachers in different placements. Sometimes student teachers thrive and grow, and sometimes they lose confidence and become stressed, anxious and confused. I often find myself asking questions about what informs the practices of associate teachers and how they see their role.

I have been further convinced of the need for this study by Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen's (2013) literature review, which was published some three years after I carried out my research. They suggest that cooperating teachers (associate teachers) are not prepared for their role and go on to say that:

> Without a clear understanding of the ways in which cooperating teachers participate - or are expected to participate - in teacher education, it is difficult to know how best to support or facilitate that work. As such, it is crucial that researchers and practitioners alike move beyond simple conceptions to more detailed and nuanced understandings that both provoke and advance how the work of cooperating teachers is conceived and enacted. Without such understandings,

> teacher educators are limited in the ways in which they can support cooperating teachers, and cooperating teachers are left to rely on their own intuitive sense of what it means to supervise student teachers. (p. 2)

For that reason I have chosen to look at the practicum from the perspective of the associate teacher. This study is an investigation into their world and is based on three broad research questions.

1.   How do associate teachers see their role?

2.   What informs associate teachers' perceptions of their role?

3.   What are associate teachers' experiences of professional learning?

Thesis Structure

Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two I will present the ways of knowing which underpin this research. I draw on sociocultural theory and a view of learning as socially situated. Associate teachers are positioned within social contexts and develop ways of knowing in response to their environment. Chapter Three reviews the literature related to the practicum and in particular the role of the associate teacher as described by student teachers, the research literature, and associate teachers themselves. It concludes with an examination of how associate teacher learning is conceptualised in the literature. The tools used to construct the research are described in Chapter Four. Understandings of qualitative research are presented and methodological matters of ethics, data collection and data analysis are described. Chapters Five and Six present the findings of the study. Chapter Five is focussed on how the associate teacher role was interpreted by the participant teachers, and Chapter Six documents their experiences of professional learning. Chapter Seven provides a discussion which links the research questions, the findings, and the literature. Chapter Eight gives an ecological framework for viewing the practicum context and Chapter Nine concludes the work with reflections on the limitations of the study and implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL CONTEXT

In this chapter I will describe the theoretical framework for this study in order to provide the reader with a context for the chapters which follow. I will briefly describe my personal world view and then explain theories which underpin the research.

Ways of Knowing

Educational research can be approached from a range of ontological and epistemological perspectives. Fitting "ways of knowing" into tidy boxes has the potential to be artificial and limiting and negotiating a pathway and providing clear signposts for the research reader can be difficult. Lather (2006) advocates embracing untidiness, but the constraints of doctoral thesis writing and the need to produce research which is accessible require the declaration of a clear theoretical stance. This is particularly important in light of the profusion of approaches to research which are available (Lather, 2006) and the lack of consistency in the use of terminology in research literature (Crotty,1998). Barcan (2002) describes the place of theory very well by saying that for many people, me included, "theory has changed the way we see the world, as well as providing a language and a conceptual framework for articulating things we already felt we knew" (p. 346). I have come to see theories as both explanations and tools for analysis (Dixon, Rata & Carpenter, 2001).

My world view has changed over time as a result of the cultural contexts which have made up my life. Significant among these are my experiences as a teacher education student where I had my first exposure to a sociocultural view of human development and learning. Since that time, as teacher, teacher educator and researcher, I have re-examined my beliefs and affirmed my commitment to a way of knowing that emphasises the interactive nature of becoming who we are.

Interpretive paradigm

This research is situated within an interpretive tradition. Interpretivisim has its roots in anthropology and sociology (Macdonald et al., 2002) and is premised on the idea of reality as

a human construct (Lather, 2006). It suggests that individuals form "truths" based on their own perceived reality and that the social world influences what we learn and what we know (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Snape & Spencer, 2003). That position allows for the existence of multiple realities which arise out of individual experiences and meaning making acknowledging that people are individuals as well as part of larger social systems (MacDonald et al., 2002). Interpretative research allows people to tell their stories and to explain how they make sense of their lives and is concerned with contexts and understanding rather than generalisation (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). This research is positioned within this paradigm because it is focused on exploring the understandings and realities of individual associate teachers and inviting them to explain how they make sense of their role.

Sociocultural theory

Underlying this study is the idea that an individual's nature and what they know are related to their "culture" (Crotty, 2006). Culture in this context is used in its broadest sense and refers to the language, the social practices, and the world in which the person is situated (Dixon, Rata & Carpenter, 2001). The way individuals think and change over time are informed by the nature of that individual, the way they interpret the world and by the social contexts in which they live their lives.

Vygotsky's premise that children's learning and development are linked to their social and cultural history provided the basis for what has become known as sociocultural theory (Smith, 1998). Vygotsky's ideas are still influential and are often cited in contemporary research (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). A Vygotskian perspective can be viewed as a way of thinking rather than as an ultimate model. It is based on the principle that learning cannot be understood without looking at the social context in which it is situated (Rogoff, 1990). This research is grounded in the principle that practice and knowledge are linked to "social action, participation and dialogue" (Christie et al., 2007, p. 266).

Teaching is both social and cultural (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012). Learning to teach can be viewed from a sociocultural perspective as "a process of socialisation or enculturation leading to shared professional knowledge through human interactions" (Cheng, 2005, p. 349). Adopting a sociocultural perspective for this research study with adults emphasises the need to look beyond the individual. A sociocultural lens suggests that teachers grow and change in

response to their individual experiences and their social environment both within the school and beyond (Rogoff, 1990). Using Vygotsky's model we can view learning to teach as a situated activity (Warford, 2011). Sociocultural ideas also resonate when considering individual teacher identities which are:

> …neither located entirely with the individual nor entirely a product of others and the social setting. They can be regarded as the ways in which practitioners see themselves in response to the actions of others towards them; that is they are the constantly changing outcomes of the iteration between how practitioners are constructed by others, and how they construct themselves, in and away from social situations. Facets of such constructions include how teachers interpret their role, the meanings and understandings which they bring to their role, their beliefs and intentions, and so on. (Kelly, 2006, p. 513)

Sociocultural theory links social interactions with learning, suggesting that individuals can learn in their zone of proximal development with support or guidance from a more capable person. A sociocultural perspective allows for the possibility of scaffolding the individual to do more than they could do without support. Masters (2013) suggests that there are three criteria for scaffolding learning:

> In order to be scaffolding an interaction must be collaborative, with the learners' own intentions being the aim of the process. Further, it must operate within the learners' Zone of Proximal Development … and the scaffolding needs to be gradually withdrawn as the learner becomes more competent at the task. (p. 2)

This position resonates for all members of the practicum setting. It suggests that associate teachers may support student teachers to learn more than they would do alone. It also raises questions about how associate teachers learn how to carry out their role and how, or if, they are supported to do so.

Intersubjectivity is a sociocultural construct (Carr et al., 2010). In simple terms it can be defined as a "shared focus of understanding or purpose" between people (Carr et al., 2010, p. 26). Rommetveit (1979) said that intersubjectivity is concerned with "in what sense and under what conditions two persons who engage in a dialogue can transcend their different private worlds" (p. 7). Intersubjectivity is a way of looking at the degree to which those who communicate share a common perspective, and the degree to which each person can move beyond their own world to negotiate and share meaning (Mortimer & Wertsch, 2003). It is not possible to understand totally what another person is thinking or their intentions (Forrester,

1999) and perfect intersubjectivity does not exist. All communication is therefore based on approximations. In the context of the practicum, intersubjectivity is a useful tool for examining alignment of intentions, interactions and communication among the practicum members.

Closely associated with sociocultural theory is a social constructionist view of the world. The similarities come from a shared emphasis on social interactions and interpretations as the basis of ways of knowing the world and ourselves.

Social constructionism

The terms "constructivism" and "constructionism" are often used interchangeably (Patton, 2002) and both are used in this study. Crotty (1998) distinguished between the two, suggesting that constructivism, which arises from psychology and learning theory, defines the experiences that individuals have when they make sense of the world, when the mind is active in constructing knowledge. Constructionism, on the other hand, has its origins in sociology and philosophy. Social constructionists believe that our culture causes us to respond to the world in different ways (Schwandt, 2003). That perspective is useful in the context of this research which is intended to add to understanding of the culture of teacher education in New Zealand. From a social constructionist perspective the knowledge that associate teachers have of teaching and learning will be related to the way that they view the world, their cultural interactions and their prior experiences. A social constructionist position suggests that reality is constructed in relation to the social context, while social constructivism is premised on the idea that learning and development are functions of the individual within a social setting. Both of these resonate in considering the associate teacher role.

Social constructionism and teaching

What it means to be a teacher is a social construction. Society has expectations of what it means to be a teacher, schools have accepted ways of operating and individual teachers have their own personal philosophies. Some expectations are unspoken and implicit and others are made very explicit, as documented by regulatory bodies such as the New Zealand Teachers' Council through the New Zealand Teachers' Council *Graduating Teacher Standards* (2007) and the *Registered Teacher Criteria* (2010).

Constructions of teaching have changed over time in response to changes in society. There has been an increasing emphasis on teaching as a way of empowering learners rather than as a means of providing knowledge. This is evident in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) which emphasises the principle of educating young people for life through the development of key competencies, attitudes, and values to allow them to become full members of society. Ell and Grudnoff (2013) have signalled that there are signs of change to that construction of teaching. The introduction of National Standards in New Zealand is just one sign that the role of the teacher and the purpose and practice of teaching are subject to change in response to shifts in political and societal expectations (O'Neill, 2012).

The practicum is also a social construction. In New Zealand, practicum began as a pupil-teacher system where prospective teachers were apprenticed to experienced teachers in schools and learned how to teach and continued their own education at the same time (Openshaw & Ball, 2005). In the years that have followed, teacher education programmes have been based outside the classroom but the practicum model where student teachers are placed in schools as part of learning to be a teacher has remained. Practicum has been constructed as a place where people learn to be teachers and this has remained the accepted cultural norm for a long time.

Theorising Practicum

Ecology of practicum

Wideen, Mayer- Smith and Moon (1998) describe learning to teach as an ecosystem made up of interconnected relationships. At a theoretical level the practicum is a particularly challenging part of that ecosystem because it is the place where the realities and experiences of each of the participants intersect (McDonald, 2009). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work on human development presents a way of thinking about the systems within which practicum occurs. He described the "ecology" of human development using the image of a series of Russian dolls to conceptualise the interconnectedness of all aspects of an individual's environment with their development. This is a useful image to apply to the practicum context, suggesting that all three members of the practicum triad exist in their own ecological contexts. For example associate teachers may be influenced not only by the roles, relationships and activities of the classroom, but also by the school, their family, their friendships, the community, the education system, and the wider political environment in which they work.

Bronfenbrenner's model reminds us that teaching is not a "solitary" endeavour and that teachers belong to a profession where they are exposed to multiple influences, which include:

> the broad educational policy context, a community's vision of education, a schools' mission towards realizing it, a curriculum through which to implement it, administrators invested in enforcing it, colleagues who helped establish it, students who have been socialized to participate in it and other relationships". (Smagorinsky et al., 2004, p. 9)

The microsystem, or the immediate setting of the learner, is at the core of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development. The roles, activities, and relationships within the microsystem have a powerful influence on learning. Bronfenbrenner's image of the mesosystem is also useful to this research. Mesosystems manifest as "the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25), such as the school and home for a child. Applied to the practicum, the mesosystem can refer to the relationship between the microsystems containing the associate teacher, the visiting lecturer and the student teacher. At the macrosystem level, associate teachers are influenced by the values and cultural goals of the society, the education system and the educational policy of the time (Haigh & Ward, 2004).

Time and place influence the degree to which an individual may identify with any particular aspect of their life, for example a person may identify strongly as a parent at some times, or as partner at other times. For teachers, the role of associate teacher may form a significant part of their personal identity, particularly when they are hosting a student teacher, however research suggests that most associate teachers do not see themselves in the teacher educator role (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Hall, Draper, Smith, & Bullough, 2008).

Rogoff (2003, 2008) links learning with social interactions. According to her, sociocultural activity consists of three related "planes of focus": personal participation; interpersonal guided participation; and the community apprenticeship, which are all interrelated and inseparable (Edwards, 1998). Rogoff's work reinforces the significance of relationships to human experiences of learning. She envisions the planes of focus not as:

> separate or hierarchical, but as simply involving different grains of focus with the whole sociocultural activity. To understand each requires the involvement of the others. Distinguishing them serves the function of clarifying the plane of focus

that may be chosen for one or other discussion of processes in the whole activity, holding the other planes of focus in the background but separated. (2008, p. 2)

In learning to teach, student teachers participate personally, interpersonally, and as members of a community or institution. Rogoff's (2008) model suggests that there is reciprocal learning potential for all members of the practicum setting through apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation. This implies that in the practicum, student teachers are learning from their relationships with and beyond the associate teacher, as they are inevitably influenced by the school community and the initial teacher education provider.

Community of practice

The concept of a community of practice is predicated on a view of learning as social and situated (McLaughlin, 2003). From a sociocultural perspective, learning and knowing are made up of several components: learning as belonging, learning as becoming, learning as doing and learning as experience. Wenger (1998) uses these ideas as an entry point for exploration of the term "community of practice", which provides a useful way of looking at learning and identity as they relate to associate teachers.

Community of practice is a generic term and communities of practice are not defined by size, location, membership, or longevity (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992) define a community of practice as "an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour … practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour" (p. 464). In a community of practice, learning is a process of learning the culture and moving into a community (Lai et al., 2006) where experiences and ideas are exchanged (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003). One might view the practicum as a community of practice in itself or as a place where student teachers negotiate entry to a school community of practice or to the teaching community as a whole.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) contribution to sociocultural theory is to link context and learning by describing how newcomers learn from full members of a community. This social learning theory connects meaning, practice, community, and identity (Buysse et al., 2003; Wenger, 1998). In this study I have acknowledged the significance of context by acknowledging the sociocultural implications of situating the study within a school community and by recognising that knowledge grows and develops in response to contextual factors.

Social engagement is integral to the concept of communities of practice. Wenger (1998) suggests that the social and the learning aspects of these groups are inextricably linked. Members are often diverse in degrees of expertise and are brought together by "mutual engagement" (Meyerhoff, 2002) rather than interpersonal compatibility. This resonates in the context of learning to be a teacher, and is particularly relevant to the practicum, where members of the community are placed together and form relationships in order for learning to occur through mutual engagement.

Applying the community of practice model to teacher education highlights some interesting questions about the place of practicum and the roles of those who contribute to it. Initial teacher education could be viewed as a community of practice if we consider changing the focus on learning from the individual student teacher to:

> a process that unfolds within a participatory framework. As a result learning is viewed as distributed among many participants within the community in which people with diverse expertise (i.e., experts, novices and those in between) are transformed through their own actions and those of other participants. (Buysse et al., 2003, p. 266)

From a community of practice perspective, the initial teacher education provider and associate teachers would contribute to the knowledge base of the community and would learn from each other with the shared goal of supporting student teachers to enter the teaching community. Barab and Duffy (2000) suggest that what distinguishes communities of practice from other types of community is a commitment to self-development through legitimate participation in the community. The effectiveness of a community of practice "depends on a variety of interpersonal factors … such as collegiality, trust, mutual respect a sense of belonging…" (Ampartzaki, Kypriotaki, Voeradou, Dardiot & Stahi, 2013, p. 5). A community of practice practicum model would feature a shared perspective and a common language and culture, resulting in the removal of the power differential as members would be negotiating and learning together to contribute to the common goal of supporting student teachers to enter the community as full members.

Learning as participation is also a useful way of thinking about how teachers learn to become associate teachers. Maynard (2001) refers to the situated view of learning suggesting that learning occurs as a result of working in the world, in this case the world of teacher education. She says that talking is a significant part of learning which "provides the learner with

information not only about how to proceed, but also about meanings, norms and ways of knowing that are specific to the particular community of practice" (p. 41). She ends by saying that learning in a socio cultural community is about "becoming a different kind of person; it involves the construction of identities", (p.41), in this case the identity of an associate teacher.

Reciprocity

Integral to both a sociocultural view of knowing and becoming and the community of practice model is the notion of reciprocity. Communities of practice are founded on reciprocity because mutual engagement is one of the defining features of that model of learning. The concept of reciprocity is important in the context of teacher education in general and the practicum in particular.

> A disposition towards reciprocity includes engaging in dialogue with others, negotiating mutual sense and interest, communicating with others …, giving an opinion, taking into account the perspectives of others, sharing responsibility, communicating ideas, and valuing being and becoming a group member. (Carr et al., 2010, p. 24)

The presence or absence of reciprocity has implications for the experience that the practicum participants have and for the learning that occurs.

Habitus

Habitus is a tool for viewing the relationship between an individual and the social fields within which they operate. The social practices of the individual impact on the setting in which they are situated and impacts and influences our social practices (Bourdieu, 1992). Smith and Tinning (2011) describe habitus as "an embodied set of dispositions, guiding principles, or strategies" (p. 237) which result from the way we see and internalise the world. Habitus provides a way of knowing "things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53) which comes from past experience. This acknowledges the ways that people are in the social world, but also that the social world is in people (Reay, 2004) which is made visible in what people do and what they think.

Social fields such as teacher education are distinguished by structures, such as conventions and titles, and ways of thinking and behaving, thus habitus suggests that the structure of that

social world is already predefined. In the practicum, habitus provides a tool for understanding the significance and mutual influence of the initial teacher education provider and the wider world of teaching and the habitus of the individuals who identify in that setting.

Summary

The purpose of this research is to examine what teachers think about their role, how their ideas have been constructed, and how they have experienced professional learning. Both sociocultural and social constructionist theories are useful in that context because they are premised on the understanding that meaning is co-constructed between the members of a community, in this case those involved in teacher education.

The theory that underpins this study is connected by a strong emphasis on the importance of relationships and the way they influence who we are and what we know. This is significant and central to this research, based on the understanding that individual identities are shaped by their cultural context. Having introduced theory as an aid to understanding, the discussion chapter shows how theory was used to help interpret the findings of this research.

This chapter has described the theoretical framework that underpins this study. It has emphasised the view that who an individual is, and what they know, develop through interactions with others. Individuals grow and change over time, and respond and learn from the different contexts in which they are situated. This perspective has implications for considering the practicum and the role of the associate teacher. In order to situate the research and to examine what is known in the field, in the next chapter a review of the literature about associate teachers is undertaken and themes which relate to the role of the associate teacher and the practicum are highlighted.

CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of the research literature related to the role of the associate teacher in the practicum from the perspectives of the practicum parties, and also professional learning in relation to the role of the associate teacher.

The language associated with the practicum has changed as the focus of practicum has evolved. One example of this is the increasing use of 'mentor' rather than other terms such as 'cooperating teacher' or 'associate teacher'. Another example is the change from 'teaching practice' to 'practicum', and more recently, 'professional experience' to describe the student teacher field experience (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Those changes are significant and signal changes in initial teacher education provider expectations of practicum (Hall et al., 2008; Loughran, 2006; Zeichner, 2002). Changed expectations however, may not result in changes to what actually happens in practice (McGee et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2008) unless they are shared with associate teachers.

Associate Teachers

The associate teacher has a vital and influential role in teacher education (Ferrier-Kerr, 2003; Haigh, Pinder & McDonald 2006; Kim & Danforth, 2012; Mitchell, Hobson & Sorenson, 2007). There is little agreement in the literature, however, about the role of the associate teacher (Sanders, Dowson & Sinclair, 2005), and associate teachers are sometimes identified as the cause of practicum problems (Clarke, 2001; Clarke, 2007; McDonald, 2009). Concerns about associate teachers are indicative of the absence of shared understandings between practicum parties about student teacher learning (Timperley, 2001). Differences in expectations of the associate teacher role among those who work in the practicum setting are symptomatic of that problem, and role confusion is a major barrier to successful practicum experiences for student teachers (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Koerner & O'Connell Rust, 2002; Rajuan et al., 2007).

Recruitment of suitable teachers who are willing to work with student teachers is often problematic. Selection of associate teachers is important because not all teachers are suited to

working with student teachers (Kahan, 2002; Murray-Harvey et al., 2000), and also because good teachers do not necessarily make good associate teachers (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2011; Timperley, 2001). Associate teachers may be well versed in teaching pedagogy but are unlikely to be familiar with the principles and practice of working with adult learners. Knowles (1980) describes the assumptions which accompany theories of adult learning by stating that as people mature

> Their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being
> They accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning
> Their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles. (p. 44)

As adult learners student teachers are different from the learners in their classrooms.

In some cases selection of associate teachers may be based on years of teaching experience, availability or willingness rather than suitability (Russell & Russell, 2011). Darling-Hammond (2006) describes the situation in the United States where some teachers are selected "with no regard for the quality or kind of practice they themselves engaged in, and often on the basis of seniority, favoritism or parity, because it is their turn to have an extra pair of hands in the classroom" (p. 152).

In the Australian context there are also problems in recruiting suitable associate teachers (Le Cornu, 2010; Walkington, 2005) and this has become increasingly apparent in New Zealand where teachers are nominated by their principal, approached by the initial teacher education provider, or volunteer themselves to work with student teachers (Kane et al., 2005). Kane reported that the problem was most prevalent in the early childhood and secondary sectors but indicated a general trend towards initial teacher education providers in New Zealand having little choice when selecting associate teachers.

Student teachers, associate teachers and visiting lecturers bring their own expectations of themselves and of others to the practicum and these expectations often remain tacit rather than explicit. In appointing people to the associate teacher role, initial teacher education providers may be implicitly signalling to student teachers that those teachers are expert practitioners (Butler & Cuenca, 2012) but this is not always the case. Confusion can also occur when initial teacher education providers emphasise the importance of questioning and critical reflection as part of the student teacher role, without sharing that goal with associate teachers, who may

interpret those strategies as a challenge to their professional credibility. There is a need for closer alignment of expectations among practicum participants and for clarification of the roles and values of each member.

Examination of the role of the associate teacher is essential for better understanding of the complexity of the practicum context (Clarke et al., 2013; Haigh & Ward, 2004; Sanders et al., 2005). Besides having ideas about their own identity as a triad member, each partner in the practicum brings their expectations to the roles of the other members.

Student teacher expectations

Student teachers have high expectations of their associate teachers and of their professional placements in schools (Fairbanks, Freedman & Kahn, 2000; Grudnoff, 2011; McNay, 2003). In the Canadian context, Beck and Kosnik (2002a) interviewed a small sample of student teachers and established their opinions about what makes a practicum successful. All but one of their preconditions for success related to the role of the associate teacher, specifically:

> emotional support from the associate teacher … a peer relationship with the associate teacher… collaboration with the associate teacher… flexibility in teaching content and method … feedback from the associate teacher … sound approach to teaching and learning on the part of the associate teacher. (p. 96)

Haigh and Ward (2004) explored the attributes of a "good" associate teacher as described by a cohort of secondary teacher trainees in New Zealand. The student teachers in their study suggested that the associate teacher role encompasses that of:

> Adviser, advocate, appraiser, assessor, collaborator, communicator, critic, encourager, expert, … helper, giver of knowledge, informer, guide, learner, listener, mentor, modellor, … negotiator, observer, organizer, provider of resources, … rescuer, risk-taker, role model, sage, sharer, … supporter teacher, … understander and welcomer. (p. 137)

The comprehensive nature of the list suggests that student teachers see the associate teacher role as multifaceted and significant (Sanders et al., 2005). Student teachers have expectations about associate teacher dispositions and attitudes as well as their actions.

Some aspects of associate teacher practice feature repeatedly in the literature. After a comprehensive literature review, Wang and Odell (2002) stated that the predominant role of a

mentor, according to both beginning teachers and student teachers, is to provide "emotional and technical support" (p. 510). In a New Zealand, study McDonald (2009) concluded that regular feedback from associate teachers who are supportive and reflective and model passion and enthusiasm for teaching is all important (p. 6).

Positive relationships

Emotions and learning are interlinked (Timperley, 2013) and positive relationships are vitally important to student teachers. Emotional support from their associate teacher is considered to be crucial for successful practica (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a; Rajuan et al, 2007; Ussher, 2011; Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt & Van Driel, 1998). Student teachers in Maynard's (2000) study described good associate teachers in terms of how they made them feel. Student teachers appreciate associate teachers who are positive, which manifests as "enthusiasm, flexibility, being supportive and approachable and having a sense of humour" (McDonald, 2009, p.4). Support and reassurance were also highlighted in Hobson's (2002) small study where student teachers said that associate teachers need to be accessible, sympathetic, positive, supportive, empathetic and willing to spend time with them (Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2011). In an American study (Franklin Torrez & Krebs, 2012) 23 per cent of the 174 student teachers surveyed said that the emotional environment was the most important factor in a good practicum, and suggested that associate teachers need to make student teachers feel part of the classroom and to offer support, respect, encouragement and feedback.

Harmonious relationships are important to student teachers (Kim & Danforth, 2012) but they are not sufficient (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a). Maynard (2001) says that student teachers experience a "tension between 'fitting in' and 'being themselves'" (p. 39). They want to do more than follow the lead of a helpful associate teacher (Hagger et al., 2008). Many student teachers wish to be respected as professional colleagues (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Huang & Waxman, 2009) and to establish relationships based on trust and communication (Stanulis & Russell, 2000, p. 65) which allow them some freedom to develop their own teaching style (Rajuan et al., 2007; Starkey & Rawlins, 2011). They want to balance being given direction with the freedom to experiment (Haigh et al., 2006), in effect experiencing a mixture of support and challenge. The interpersonal nature of the practicum is one area of interest for student teachers but some of them have expectations beyond feeling welcome and supported.

Providing Feedback

The literature suggests that many student teachers want help with the more technical aspects of teaching such as planning. They also want associate teachers to give information and advice and most importantly, to give them feedback (Fayne, 2007; Hennissen et al., 2011). Student teachers value feedback highly (McDonald, 2009; Starkey & Rawlins, 2011) and it is seen as central to the associate teacher role (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a; Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Hobson, 2002; McDonald, 2004; Koster, Korthagen & Wubbels, 1998). Written feedback which can be kept and reread is useful, and student teachers want this to contain suggestions, advice and encouragement (Bunton, Stimpson & Lopez-Real, 2002).

Starkey and Rawlins, (2011) reported that the student teachers in their study thought that all feedback was useful but differences in how individuals perceive and receive feedback were revealed. Some student teachers want to follow advice and others want to have their thinking challenged. Student teachers in Torrez and Krebs' (2012) study valued constructive criticism, and participants in Le Cornu's (2010) research acknowledged the value of feedback that is positive and also that which gave them a challenge. Hagger et al., (2008) reported that their student teachers differed in their attitudes to feedback. Some were able to make good use of any feedback while others were defensive. In Hobson's (2002) study, student teachers were interested in feedback but not in looking deeply at the reasons behind the feedback. Feedback and support from an associate teacher are central to student teacher expectations of practicum, but the type of feedback and the way it is received may vary among individuals.

Role modelling

The literature suggests that some student teachers measure successful associate teachers by their currency in teaching practice, curriculum, and resourcing (McDonald, 2004). Rozelle and Wilson (2012) reported that associate teacher classroom practices have a significant impact on student teachers' later identity as teachers. Student teachers often want associate teachers to model what they see as sound pedagogical practice (Fayne, 2007; Haigh & Ward, 2004; Koerner & O'Connell Rust, 2002; McDonald, 2004), and it can be stressful when what they are being taught at the provider institution conflicts with what they see happening in their practica (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Meijer, Zantiing & Verloop, 2002) or worse still, when they are doing what student teachers have been told not to do. On the other hand, there is evidence that some student teachers can use this tension as a catalyst for learning. Rajuan,

Beijaard and Verloop (2008) describe this as the "advantages of dissonance" (p. 279), suggesting the need for both support and challenge as conditions for learning (Tang, 2003). Many student teachers see the value of their practicum in terms of the quality of their associate teacher and most hope they will get a 'good one'. Duffield's (2006) metaphor for the associate teacher role is a safety net when tightrope walking, which suggests that student teachers want to work safely in collaboration with associate teachers and to be supported and encouraged. Having examined student teacher expectations of the associate teacher role, I turn now to analysis of the way the role of the associate teacher is conceptualised in the research literature.

Models of learning to teach

Expectations of associate teachers in the research literature are inconsistent (Sanders et al., 2005) and have changed over time. Questions about what the associate teacher role is, how it should be carried out and what conditions are necessary for quality practicum experiences have been the focus of considerable researcher attention. Integral to understanding the work of the associate teacher are beliefs about the nature of learning to teach, an area which is complex and ambiguous (Fairbanks et al., 2000; Timperley, 2001). In this review I have adopted the model provided by Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) which suggests that there are three orientations to the practice of learning to teach, which she terms the "traditional view", the "reflective view" and the "learning communities" view. Each perspective has implications for the role of the associate teacher.

Traditional view

The traditional view of learning to teach is predicated on the understanding that teaching is a craft which can be learned by apprenticeship (Grudnoff & Tuck, 2003) and that practice is the "centerpiece" of a teacher's work (Ball & Forzani, 2009). This vision is based on a technical–rational approach to learning to teach (Schőn, 1983) where the role of the expert associate teacher is to induct apprentice student teachers (Hargreaves, 2000; Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010) as they learn about the realities of teaching. In this orientation associate teachers are engaged in initiation and gatekeeping (Koster et al., 1998), and the associate teacher role is to share the knowledge of the craft of teaching that they have gained through experience (Zanting, Verloop & Vermunt, 2001).

This traditional view is illustrated in the Balch and Balch (1987) model which positions teaching as a set of skills to be learned by a less experienced person from observation of a supportive expert. From this perspective the associate teacher role includes: modelling, observing, and evaluating. The traditional apprenticeship view of teacher education is thus predicated on perpetuating the status quo, as student teachers are required to follow an existing model of practice where the associate teacher is a model practitioner (Glenn, 2006; Koerner & O'Connell Rust, 2002).

Reflective practice

Some researchers contend that teaching is more than a learned craft and suggest that learning to teach requires the development of "a set of dispositions … about teaching, children and the role of the teacher" (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 387). From this viewpoint student teachers should be preparing for the uncertainties of the future (Borko & Mayfield, 1995) and developing a range of personal skills and attributes which will allow them to respond to various situations as they arise, rather than replicating the ways of the past, by developing their reflective and adaptive abilities (Korthagen, 2004; Murray, Nuttall & Mitchell, 2008; Timperley, 2013). Grudnoff and Tuck (2003) label this the "critical interventionist" model and suggest that it encourages student teachers to engage in critical reflection and to question the status quo. From that perspective the purpose of teacher education is to support the student teacher to become a resilient, reflective practitioner (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000). Zeichner (1996) says that this is necessary because:

> unless the practicum helps to teach prospective teachers how to take control of their own professional development and to learn how to continue learning, it is miseducative, no matter how successful the teacher might be in the short run. (p. 217)

The term 'reflective practice' features frequently in the teacher education literature and the term is interpreted in a multitude of ways. It can be understood at a superficial level as thinking or as thinking about a problem (Loughran, 2006). Schőn (1983) coined the terms 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' which help to clarify what is meant by reflective practice. Reflection-in-action refers to that thinking which occurs during teaching and reflection-on-action to the thinking that takes place after the event involving contemplating and making connections with other sources of knowledge for the purpose of learning (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997). Reflection can thus be presented as an opportunity

for uniting theory and practice (Kane & Broadley, 2005). Regardless of how one interprets the term, viewing teaching as reflective practice requires a deeper level of thinking and conversation in the practicum setting and brings different expectations to the associate teacher role, one of which is to support student teacher reflection (Stegman, 2007).

This change to the associate teacher role can be described as a change from "supervision" to "mentoring" (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008) where mentoring requires collaboration and facilitation of on-going reflective conversations (Kane & Broadley, 2005). The reflective model suggests that associate teachers should support student teachers to develop their own personal philosophy of teaching and to set and achieve personal goals rather than following the associate teacher model without question. Viewed in this way, associate teachers need to be skilled reflective practitioners who can articulate their own philosophy of teaching and who are open to challenge and change.

There is evidence of the reflective view of learning to teach in the New Zealand research literature. Hoben (2007) devised a framework for the role of the associate teacher in a secondary school context that included opportunities for student teachers to reflect on their practice. Sanders (2005) suggested that associate teacher work requires them to know about their role, to know how to build relationships and to engage in reflective practice.

Co-teaching

Co-teaching is a model of teaching which is increasingly being applied in special education contexts when instruction in a mainstream classroom, that includes children with disabilities, is shared between a generalist classroom teacher and a special education specialist teacher. This model is also being used as a way of learning to teach in the practicum. Perl, Maughmer & McQueen (1999) explain that in the co-teaching model of practicum the student teacher and their associate teacher work together and share instruction and delivery. Co-teaching can also refer to the placement of more than one student teacher in a classroom. There are claims that learning to work collaboratively through co-teaching provides student teachers with a core skill central to learning to be a teacher (Friend & Cook, 1996; Bashan & Holsblat, 2012). On the other hand simply placing people together does not ensure successful learning for student teachers and co-teaching in the practicum is not easy. It requires an associate teacher to be able to work closely with adult learners and to share and compromise.

Community

In some quarters there has been a move towards a more unified approach to initial teacher education in general and practicum in particular (Zeichner, 2002). Learning to teach is increasingly being seen as a shared endeavour where communication and partnership are useful for bridging the gap and improving practicum for student teachers (Allen, Ambrosetti & Turner, 2013). Beck and Kosnik (2001) emphasise the value of developing a sense of community in initial teacher education, both within the campus-based component and in the practicum.

Communities are more than a group of people brought together by proximity. In this model of practicum the idea of reflective practice is expanded to incorporate "a focus on reciprocal learning relationships and a deepening participatory process" (Le Cornu, 2010, p.196). Labelled the "critical interventionist" model by Beck and Kosnik (2000) it suggests that all members of the practicum community should work together to achieve transformative teaching and learning as part of a professional learning community (Tang & Choi, 2005). The associate teacher is conceptualised as a "trusted professional colleague" (Le Cornu, 2010 p. 200) and the relationship between initial teacher education providers and the schools is collegial, authentic and reciprocal. Ferrier-Kerr (2009) described mentoring as a professional relationship where the associate teacher and their student teachers are both active in the relationship and there is some degree of reciprocity.

I have described some of the ways that the role of the associate teacher is presented in the research literature and have shown that there are different expectations of associate teachers associated with different models. Perhaps the most significant change in the view of the associate teacher role has been the increasing perception of the associate teacher as a mentor and colleague rather than a master craftsperson.

Mentoring

Research into mentoring has been available since the 1970s (Jones & Brown, 2011) and the "mentor phenomena" in education was identified by Feiman-Nemser and Parker as long ago as 1992. The use of the term mentor is now common in teacher education, especially in relation to the induction period for beginning teachers (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006;

Cameron, 2009; McDonald & Flint, 2011; Wang & Odell, 2002), but also in pre-service teacher education (Hall et al., 2008; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005).

The change in terminology is a sign of a move away from a hierarchical approach to working with student teachers (Brandenburg, 2004; Le Cornu, 2005) but while there has been widespread adoption of the term 'mentor' (Murray et al., 2008), it is hard to define and is interpreted in a multiplicity of ways (Devos, 2010; Jones & Brown, 2011).

The terms 'cooperating teacher' and 'mentor' are sometimes used interchangeably (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). Hall et al. (2008) surveyed 264 mentor teachers in the Western United States and found that there was a:

> lack of a shared understanding between university teacher educators and public school teachers about the roles and responsibilities of mentoring and we noticed a good deal of confusion about the terms *mentor* and *mentoring* … teachers (who) often think of mentoring as synonymous with the designation *cooperating teacher* and means nothing more than providing a place for the pre-service teacher to practice teaching and offering a little support. (p. 343)

One reason that defining mentor and mentoring is a challenge is that mentoring is context and time dependent (Devos, 2010). Tang and Choi (2005) suggested that changes to views of mentoring reflect the way that teacher professionalism has changed. Butler and Cuenca (2012) agree and add that perceptions of mentoring are socially constructed and that interpretations of the role vary greatly. Consequently there is no agreed definition for mentoring (Starkey & Rawlings, 2011), and the term needs further investigation.

There is a considerable literature that attempts to define mentors and mentoring. One view is that mentoring is one-to-one support of an inexperienced person by a more experienced person to help to induct them into the profession (Hobson, Ashby Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). Some researchers focus on mentoring as a set of skills (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, and Bergen, 2008; McDonald, 2004), while others position the mentor teacher as someone who will facilitate learning and engage in reflection and discussion (Hall et al., 2008). Glenn (2006) suggests that associate teachers should "collaborate rather than dictate, relinquish an appropriate level of control, allow for personal relationships, share constructive feedback, and accept differences" (p. 88), while Cochran-Smith (2004b) suggests that mentoring incorporates intellect, culture and context.

Mentoring has also been described in terms of relationships. Gormley (2008) said that trust and emotional connection are central to all types of mentoring. Trust is also emphasised by Stanulis and Russell (2000) who link mentoring to compassionate, caring relationships (Butler & Cueneca, 2012; Tillema, Smith & Leshem, 2011). Awaya et al., (2003) use the metaphor of a journey requiring trust and time to describe mentoring, while Fairbanks et al. (2000) suggest that the mentor is a companion on the journey that mentees are taking to find to themselves.

The mentor role is conceptualised in so many ways in the literature that it is challenging to find a universally acceptable definition (Butler & Cuenca, 2012). This has resulted in the adoption of another term that is more specific to the role of mentor in educational settings. The introduction of the term "educative mentoring" in teacher education was an attempt to distinguish it from mentoring in general (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Schwille, 2008).

Educative Mentoring

McDonald and Flint (2011) examine educative mentoring in the context of beginning teachers and claim that it is different from more traditional forms of mentoring in that it is focused on equipping the mentee for the future and is premised on a clear understanding of what constitutes good teaching. Educative mentoring reflects Vygotsky's learning theory that knowledge construction requires scaffolded support which is timely and relevant to the individual (Schwille, 2008). Facilitating reflection on practice is another important aspect of the role of educative mentor. Cameron (2009) cites the UK National Framework which details the skills a mentor needs as follows:

1. Relate sensitively to learners and work through agreed processes to build trust and confidence.
2. Model expertise in practice or through conversation.
3. Relate guidance to evidence from practice and research.
4. Broker access to a range of opportunities to address the different goals of the professional learners.
5. Observe, analyse and reflect upon professional practice, and make this explicit.
6. Provide information and feedback that enable learning from mistakes and success.
7. Build learners' control over their professional learning.

8.   Use open questions to raise awareness, explore beliefs, develop plans, understand consequences and explore and commit to solutions.

9.   Listen actively:

- accommodating and valuing silence

- concentrating on what's actually being said

- using affirming body language to signal attention

- replaying what's been said using some of the same words to reinforce, value and reframe thinking

10.   Relate practice to assessment and accreditation frameworks. (p. 64)

Educative mentoring, then, encompasses both support and challenge (Rajuan et al., 2008). As educative mentors, associate teachers need to examine student teacher actions and also the thinking behind those actions (Zanting et al., 2001). Implicit in educative mentoring is an expectation that practicum should provide opportunities for collaborative inquiry, testing new ideas, and professional conversations (Schulz, 2005), suggesting that the associate teacher role requires teachers to be able to share their thinking and to help student teachers to learn how to reflect on their own teaching in order to improve (Kane & Broadley, 2005; Timperley, 2001). Facilitating reflection is at the heart of educative mentoring (Schwille, 2008).

I have described the role of the associate teacher from the student teachers' perspective and from the literature which informs initial teacher education programmes. I now turn to explore how the role is seen by the associate teachers themselves.

Associate teacher perspectives

While there is considerable literature about what the associate teacher role should be, there is limited information available which presents their perspectives on their role (Hastings, 2004; Kahn, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2007; Russell & Russell, 2011; Sim, 2011; Torrez & Krebs, 2012; Wideen et al., 1998) or about how they learn to be associate teachers (Nielsen et al., 2010). Associate teachers are often focused on the technical elements of teaching (Beck & Kosnik, 2000). Mitchell et al. (2007) found that teachers in both Canada and Australia perceived their work with student teachers in terms of the practical aspects of teaching such as being well prepared and management of children. Practical matters are also seen as core work in the

United Kingdom (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003) and in New Zealand (Timperley, Rubie, Black, Stavert & Taylor-Patel, 2000).

Associate teachers generally have good intentions (Sinclair, Dowson & Thistleton-Martin, 2006) and recognise that their work is important (Anderson, 2007; Russell & Russell, 2011). There is also evidence that teachers choose to work with student teachers because they are committed to supporting them to become teachers and to the teaching profession (McDonald, 2009; Sinclair et al., 2006).

Most teachers find working with student teachers rewarding and fulfilling (Ganser, 2002; Simpson et al., 2007) and many associate teachers are aware of the potential for reciprocity, recognising that working with a student teacher provides opportunities for professional learning (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Russell & Russell, 2011; Torrez & Krebs, 2012). Minott and Willett's (2011) small study of four cooperating teachers said that their teaching skills such as planning and evaluation developed through working with a student teacher and that they were able to adopt teaching strategies that their student teachers had used. Simpson et al. (2007) investigated the benefits of working with student teachers for associate teachers in early childhood and primary school settings in rural Australia. They categorised the outcomes for teachers as personal, professional and technical, and concluded that, "existing professional experience programmes provide excellent opportunities for collaborative inquiry and hence professional development" (p. 496). Some of the participant teachers in Russell and Russell's (2011) study said that working with student teachers gave them new energy and made them reflect on their practices while the associate teachers in Landt's (2004) study reported that they improved their practices as a consequence of their work with student teachers. Beck & Kosnik (2000) remind us that there are also advantages in simply having an extra pair of hands in the classroom.

On the other hand, working with student teachers can be challenging and stressful and there are many emotions associated with the associate teacher role. One cause of tension is classroom management by student teachers (McDonald, 2004; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001), and another is the challenge of establishing personal relationships. Student teachers and associate teachers are not always compatible, and building effective relationships with successive student teachers can be stressful. One example was described in a New Zealand study by McDonald (2009) who reported that an associate teacher felt intimidated by a

student teacher who she thought was trying to "prove how much she knew and use big words" (p. 40). Student teachers are challenging for associate teachers when they are disrespectful and appear not to care about the practicum, and also when they are not succeeding.

Difficult or failing students are problematic for some associate teachers. An Australian study (Hastings, 2004) established that associate teachers feel guilty, anxious, responsible, stressed, frustrated, and sympathetic in that situation. Associate teachers can also feel vulnerable and concerned about hurting student teachers' feelings (Maynard, 2000). There is some evidence that associate teachers' professional identities can be damaged by hosting a failing student teacher which may reflect badly on them, and they worry about how this may be perceived by colleagues (Sim, 2011). That concern may even dissuade teachers from taking on the role of associate teacher in future (Sinclair et al., 2006). Vulnerability is part of being a teacher but is particularly part of being a mentor. Bullough (2005) explains in the context of mentoring a beginning teacher, that as a mentor "managing one's own vulnerability is essential to creating the conditions and providing the kinds of support and challenge needed to assist a beginning teacher" (p. 37). This is also applicable to working with student teachers.

Uncertainty is a problem for some associate teachers. A research project involving conversations between associate teachers and university staff in British Columbia revealed that the teachers lacked clarity about their role (Nielsen et al., 2010). They were not sure what student teachers were learning in the campus-based components of the teacher education programme, they lacked clarity about what they should expect from student teachers, and they were not sure if they were doing a good job. In New Zealand there are also differences in associate teacher understandings. In one small study the associate teachers said that their role was to induct student teachers into the profession (Lind, 2004), while in another they saw their role as more complex and diverse "comprising the multiple roles of model, mentor, guide, coach facilitator and supervisor" (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009, p. 793). It appears that much of the work of an associate teacher relies on individual assumptions, but there is a widespread view that their role is to establish relationships and offer practical support (Cameron, 2007; Wang & Odell, 2002).

Relationships

Positive relationships in the practicum setting are important to associate teachers as well as student teachers (Graham, 2006; Hastings, 2004; Kim & Danforth, 2012). In general these teachers care about the student teachers that they work with and friendships may develop that last beyond the practicum (Hastings, 2004). Hall et al. (2008) explored associate teacher perspectives from a large sample across the early childhood, primary and secondary sectors and found that "emotional and professional support" (p. 335) for student teachers was seen as central to their role across all groups. This is a dominant theme in the research literature. In their comparative study of associate teachers in Canada and Australia, J. Mitchell et al., (2007) reported that participants were also focused on supporting student teachers to form positive relationships with children as an important part of their role.

Feedback

Providing feedback is seen by many associate teachers as an important part of their role (McDonald, 2004; Torrez & Krebs, 2012) and in Hong Kong, Kwan and Lopez-Real's (2005) teachers saw this as their primary role. Feedback can be given and interpreted in many ways depending on the perspectives of the participants. In the USA, Kim and Danforth (2012) analysed the metaphors that were involuntarily used by associate teachers to describe how they saw supervision of student teachers. They represented their role as friend, owner, coach, big sister, flexible entity, gardener, nurturer, container and builder. The study concluded that there are tensions for associate teachers in trying to find a balance between being supportive and challenging student teacher thinking, which are symptomatic of a lack of clarity about the associate teacher role and about the practice and purpose of feedback. The associate teachers were aware that the relationship between the teacher and the student teacher can be destroyed by being too critical in giving feedback.

Perceptions of the purpose and practice of feedback reflect implicit understandings of the purpose of practicum. The traditional practicum model is hierarchical. The associate teacher assumes the dominant role and the student teacher is "subservient" and powerless (Wang & Ha, 2012). Graham (2006) interviewed secondary school associate teachers and asked them how they perceived their role and classified their responses as 'maestro' and 'mentor'. Maestros were focused on helping student teachers with the technical and managerial aspects of teaching and wanted student teachers to follow the model that they provided. Mentors had

a more complex view of teaching, expected more input from student teachers and facilitated and encouraged discussion and questioning. Roland (2010) reported that the associate teachers she surveyed also fell into two groups: those who saw their role as a mentor who models, coaches and nurtures student teachers in a reciprocal process (p. 42) and those who saw the role as "experiential learning specialists" (p. 42) who regarded student teachers as apprentices learning the ropes from an expert in the real world of the classroom. In contrast, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005) reported that their teachers saw feedback as a tool to help student teachers to develop their own teaching style and address their own areas of need, rather than to create teachers in their own image.

The transition from classroom teacher to mentor of student teachers requires a shift in thinking and a considerable level of knowledge and skill. Orland-Barak (2005) likens this to learning another language and suggests that mentors can become "lost in translation" (p. 355). This is not surprising given the complex and varied interpretations of the role of mentor in the educational literature. It is little wonder that many studies indicate associate teachers are not acting as educative mentors.

Becoming an Associate Teacher

Associate teachers need training, support and recognition to prepare them for their role (Wang & Odell, 2002; Wilson, 2006; Zeichner, 2010). In New Zealand most of them receive little or no preparation (McDonald, 2004; Russell & Russell, 2011; Sanders et al., 2005) and little support from initial teacher education providers (Ell, 2011). This has long been the case. In 1990, Battersby and Ramsay reported that the majority of associate teachers had no preparation for their role. Fifteen years later Kane et al. (2005) claimed that most providers were offering professional development for associate teachers in the form of meetings, workshops, and distribution of information books, but until recently, there has been no formal requirement "for the training of teachers in supervisory and mentoring roles" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 23).

Little attention has been given to what influences and informs the way associate teachers carry out their role (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2010; J. Mitchell et al., 2007; Nielsen et al., 2010, Wang & Odell, 2002) and very few studies have looked at associate teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for working that role. One exception is a small American study (Colvin,

Rose, Pilgrim & Berry (2011) where fourteen associate teachers were interviewed about how prepared they were. Most of them felt prepared because of their teaching experience, which they believed gave them the necessary skills and attributes. Some of them said that their personal experiences as student teachers also gave them a model for their own associate teacher practices, while three of them said that they did not feel prepared for their role.

Teachers' tacit knowledge is reflected in their work with student teachers (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005; Stanulis & Russell, 2000), and associate teachers may have predetermined expectations of their role and of their student teachers, based on their own experiences of learning to teach (Hall et al., 2008; Kahan, 2002; McGee et al., 2010) and their sociocultural contexts (Jones & Brown, 2011). In effect, these expectations are constructed independently of the initial teacher education provider (Goodfellow & Sumsion, 2000; Lind, 2004; Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012). Associate teachers also bring their understandings of teaching children to their role, suggesting that there may be some similarities between their work with student teachers and how they work with their pupils (Jones & Straker, 2006; Martin, 1997).

Some associate teachers are conscious of the lack of professional development for their role (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Colvin et al., 2012; Nielsen et al., 2010; Russell & Russell, 2011) but not all teachers want to engage in that work. In her New Zealand study, McDonald (2009) said that associate teachers know that they need support to carry out their role, but added that they may not be willing or able to engage with that support when and if it is offered. Similarly in Canada, Beck and Kosnik (2000) interviewed a group of associate teachers and found that although they were in favour of more professional development in their school, they were not interested in courses on being an associate teacher. One said that in light of her previous experiences with student teachers she felt that she now knew what to do.

Concerns with associate teacher preparation are highlighted in much of the research literature and many studies have suggested that improvement in associate teachers is a solution for practicum problems (McDonald, 2004; Ross, 2002; Sanders, 2009; Timperley, 2001). Typical of those is an Australian study which states that associate teachers need to "undertake professional development and training in effective mentoring to enable them to provide fully-rounded practicum experiences for the pre-service teachers with whom they are required to work" (Keogh, Dole & Hudson, 2006, p. 1). Associate teachers are presented in some places as well-meaning, but lacking ability (Anderson, 2007) and there are suggestions that they may

not be able to function as effective mentors (Sinclair, 1997). There is a range of perspectives on how associate teacher improvement could be effected, which vary depending on how the practice of teaching and the role of the associate teacher are interpreted. The strategies for associate teachers' induction can be categorised as "training", "professional development" and "learning community" approaches.

Training

This approach to associate teacher preparation is based on the premise that teachers can be trained in the skills needed for supervision of student teachers in practice (Kahan, 2002; McDonald, 2004; McDonald, 2009). An example is found in the work of Koster, Korthagen and Wubbels (1998), who trained teachers in supervision and counselling. They concluded that training can improve teachers' abilities to listen, observe, reflect, and problem-solve. Crasborn et al.'s (2011) research reported on the results of a training programme designed to develop associate teachers' skills for promoting student teacher reflection. They found that associate teachers need to be versatile because of the differences between individual student teachers. Associate teacher training has also occurred in New Zealand. Hoben (2007) trained secondary school associate teachers in the complexities of giving useful feedback, which she said:

> requires understanding of the goals of practicum, the objectives of the lesson observed and some understanding of how to deliver feedback in ways that ensure the recipient 'hears' and takes responsibility for making the necessary changes. (p. 181)

Timperley (2001) trained associate teachers to engage in 'mentoring conversations' with the intention of moving the focus of conversations in practicum settings from practical concerns to those which promote student teacher professional learning. In another New Zealand study, Sanders (2009) was effectively training associate teachers when she selected 12 tasks to be completed during practicum which were designed so that associate teachers and student teachers had to engage in 'pedagogical dialogue' (p. 4). She titled her paper *In-situ professional development* and concluded that the skills, attitudes, and dispositions of the four associate teachers in her 18 month study had been successfully changed as a result of the intervention.

Although little is known about the impact of training programmes for associate teachers (Crasborn et al., 2008), there are some suggestions that training can be effective (Koster, Korthagen & Wubbels, 1998; Sanders, 2009; Timperley, 2001). One comprehensive examination of the international research literature found that mentor preparation can have a positive impact on mentors' knowledge, skills and practice (Wang & Odell, 2002), however, training may not be a panacea. Providing associate teachers with support in specific aspects of their work is important but there are some fundamental flaws with "training" associate teachers as mentors (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Wang & Odell, 2002). In an Australian study, Sinclair (1997) explored the effect of 10 hours training for associate teachers which led to greater understanding of the initial teacher education programme, but found that changes to mentoring practices were inconsistent and were not sustained.

One problem with training associate teachers is that a focus on one aspect of their role may obscure a view of the role of mentor as 'multidimensional and complex' (Harrison, Lawson & Wortley, 2005). Further, each teacher is different (Caruso, 1998; Crasborn et al., 2011), each student teacher they work with is different (Hagger et al., 2008; McDonald, 2009), and the needs of all parties change over time (Crasborn et al., 2011; Maynard, 2001; Pollard, 2005; Rippon & Martin, 2006). Schwille (2008) suggests that working as an educative mentor is complex and requires associate teachers to:

> go beyond emotional or psychological support and resource procurement and base their practice on the promise that learning to teach requires creating learning opportunities that unveil the mentee intellectually in her or his zone of proximal development. (p. 141)

Training associate teachers in isolated mentoring skills may not be sufficient to provide opportunities for useful learning experiences for student teachers (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Crasborn et al., 2011; Devos, 2010). The term training suggests a degree of standardisation of the activities of a mentor (Devos, 2010). This conflicts with a view of mentoring where the "best mentors are those who can negotiate their way through the shifting sands of support at the right time for each person, allowing the power to shift accordingly" (Rippon & Martin, 2006, p. 86).

Bruner (1996) reminds us that the assumptions and beliefs that an individual teacher holds impact on the way they act and interact with others. Effective mentoring requires openness and honesty, suggesting a need to connect with the identity of the individual, because the way

people act is related to the 'cognitions' that drive and inform their behaviour (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010). Mentor development programmes therefore need to be 'educational' but also 'relational' and must support teachers to develop mentoring skills and also to think of themselves as mentors as well as teachers (Bullough, 2005). Supporting associate teachers who are learning to mentor, requires engagement with the individuality of the associate teacher who needs opportunities to reconstruct his/her identity and to "free themselves from the idiosyncratic practices they may have developed over the years" (Jones & Straker, 2006, p. 182).

Professional learning

A different approach to supporting teachers to learn to work with student teachers can be described as professional development, however professional development is a non-specific term which can be interpreted in a variety of ways and requires clarification. Kennedy (2005) identified nine models of continuing professional development for teachers and categorised them according to the degree to which they facilitate autonomy as a professional and transformative practice. She arranged the framework as a continuum and listed the professional development models in order as the training model, the award-bearing model, the deficit model, the cascade model, the standards-based model, the coaching-mentoring model, the community of practice model, action research, and the transformative model. Each model has associated characteristics, expectations and implications. Thus, training can be conceptualised as one model of professional development.

Professional learning is an essential aspect of being a teacher, and some describe teaching as "the learning profession" (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Gilmore (2001) interprets professional development broadly as those informal and formal learning experiences that teachers engage in through their work. The terminology used in this field varies (Eaton & Carbone, 2008) and there is a view that professional development and professional learning are not the same thing (Hoban, 2002). Teacher change may be a better frame of reference (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid, & Mckinney, 2007). The term in current use in New Zealand for the development of teachers is professional learning and development, which takes away some of the ambiguity in the term "professional development" (Fraser et al., 2007) and emphasises the significance of learning as a focus for the activity.

The traditional model of professional development is predicated on transferring knowledge to teachers who are lacking (Poskitt, 2005; Wang & Odell, 2002), delivered by an expert (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Kennedy, 2005; Webster-Wright, 2009). This approach was traditionally described in New Zealand as in-service training. Bourke, McGee and O'Neill (2008) express reservations about professional development which is delivered to teachers and suggest that this top-down model is flawed in that it has "often placed teachers in a passive role with an expectation that the 'knowledge' will be transferred and somehow translated into action to bring about changes in teacher practice" (p. 66).

Flint, Zissok and Fisher (2011) point out the failings of professional development which does not respect the prior knowledge, needs and individuality of the teachers. This is significant in the context of professional learning for associate teachers and signals the merits of a more personalised approach to that work (Poskitt, 2005; Shawer, 2010). Avalos (2011) says that teacher professional learning:

> requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively, the capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs and the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for improvement or change. (p. 10)

Changes to what is considered best practice in professional development mirror those which have occurred in teacher education, and there are suggestions that the two are closely linked (Villiers & Mackisack, 2011). The shift can be conceptualised as the difference between delivering knowledge and facilitating learning (Webster-Wright, 2009).

Over time there has been a move towards a more reflective, learner-centred view of teachers' professional learning (Harnett, 2007) evident in the rise of teacher action research in schools and the teaching as inquiry model presented in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007). Learning is recognised as complex and situated as a process rather than an event (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Poskitt (2005) commented that:

> teachers have varying requirements for professional development and it is important therefore that professional development programmes adapt content and delivery to suit the individual needs of teachers and schools. Moreover teachers need to be involved in analysing their own professional development needs and determining the content, pace and style of professional development. (p. 140)

Reflective professional development is less about acquiring knowledge and more about changing behaviour through self-awareness (Osterman & Kotkamp, 1993). Individual personal reflection is essential to addressing routine behaviour (Kwakman, 2003), however, professional development is also enriched by opportunities to interact with others (Gardiner & Robinson, 2011; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

Various terms are used to describe the phenomenon of learning together such as cluster groups and learning networks (Edwards, 2012), but all professional learning communities are founded on a belief that learning is socially situated (Borko, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991) and that there is value in sharing and reflection within a social learning relationship. School-based professional development is now seen as a powerful professional learning strategy (Hargreaves, 2000; Hill, Hawk & Taylor, 2001). It allows for collaboration, support and sustainability of professional learning (Piggot-Irvine, 2006).

Feiman-Nemser (2001a) summarised what she described as the "current discourse" about professional learning for teachers by saying that it takes place through engagement in communities of practice. She suggested that talk is central to this and that disagreement is an opportunity for learning. Opfer and Pedder (2011) remind us of the importance of thinking about the sociocultural context when considering teacher learning. Learning in communities is predicated on the understanding that within a community the members will trust each other, respect each other, be able to collaborate, and be open to learning from their differences (Gardiner & Robinson, 2011; Grossman, Wineberg & Woolworth, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000). Lovett and Cameron (2011) emphasised the importance of school culture for successful teacher learning and suggested that social interactions and collegiality are important conditions for a quality professional learning environment.

In their *Best Evidence Synthesis* about teacher learning, Timperley et al. (2007) examined core studies about professional learning and development and concluded that there are seven conditions that maximize learning for teachers:

> Providing sufficient time for extended opportunities to learn and using time effectively; engaging external expertise; focusing on engaging teachers in the learning process rather than being concerned about whether they volunteered or not; challenging problematic discourses; providing opportunities to interact in a community of professionals; ensuring content was consistent with wider policy

trends; and, in school-based initiatives, having leaders actively leading the professional learning opportunities. (p. xxvi)

These principles emphasise the importance of prolonged interpersonal engagement and open-mindedness for effective teacher learning and are significant and relevant when considering professional learning for associate.

In their literature review Opfer and Pedder (2011) emphasised the complex nature of teacher learning. They suggest that to be effective, learning opportunities must reference the ecology in which the learner operates, otherwise learning may be superficial and result in a change in practice but not in personal beliefs. Effective professional learning for associate teachers then, must access the individual knowledge and beliefs of the associate teacher and in doing so acknowledge the significance of their sociocultural context and consider their needs (Eaton & Carbone, 2008). This requires a shift in ways of thinking about teaching and learning towards reflecting on what they do, what they understand and how they know (Andreotti & Major, 2010). Those who teach teachers how to mentor student teachers must recognise and be sensitive to, the individuality of the associate teacher learner (Lind, 2004; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Teachers who work with student teachers need to have the opportunity for professional learning about their role (Cheng, 2010; Lind, 2004; Nielsen et al., 2010; Sanders, 2009; Turnbull, 2005). Clarke (2007) wrote from a Canadian perspective and said that:

> It is widely acknowledged that the current practices for ensuring that cooperating teachers are professionally prepared for their work are woefully inadequate, and fail to address some of the most basic issues associated with the advisory work these teachers undertake when working with student teachers. (p. 3)

The challenges of the role of the associate teacher role are undervalued (Atpuhasamy, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2007). Associate teachers should not be expected to interpret that role and act in accordance with the changing expectations of initial teacher education providers without support (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003; Sim 2011).

In New Zealand, professional development for associate teachers has traditionally consisted of transmission of information from the initial teacher education provider to the associate teacher through workshops or in written form. This is not consistent with a view of

professional development as learning, because the professional development literature suggests that teachers learn:

> in a way that shapes their practice, from a diverse range of activities from formal PD programs, through interactions with work colleagues to experiences outside work, in differing combinations and permutations of experiences. (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 705)

Repeated calls for closer relationships between members of the practicum community signal the need for a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to associate teacher professional learning; an approach that reflects the complexity of the practicum setting, the complexity of the role of the associate teacher and the individuality of the teachers who work in this role.

Learning in communities

Practicum is increasingly being viewed as a site for working together to form professional learning communities (Edwards, 2012; Goodnough et. al, 2009; Grudnoff, 2011) and as a situated way of approaching teacher professional development (Borko, 2004; Pugach, 1999). Social learning theory suggests that working together is beneficial for the learning of all members of a community, thus learning to be an associate teacher can occur as a result of being a member of the practicum community. At the heart of this perspective is the concept of reciprocity and the notion that all parties in the practicum can share their experiences and learn from each other (Goodnough et al., 2009; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

In a learning community, associate teachers can engage in professional learning as a result of their role, rather than in preparation for their role. Cheng (2010) linked associate teacher professional development with mentoring secondary school student teachers in the United States and developed a project where teachers and student teachers worked collaboratively. He found that working with student teachers had a positive impact on the mentor teachers' practices as a result of their collaboration in planning and teaching to meet the needs of their students. Landt (2004) cautions that professional growth is not an inevitable outcome of working with student teachers, but suggested that it is a possibility if teachers are interested in, and open to, reflecting on their practice.

The Professional Development School movement in the United States is one formal approach to developing a learning community of academics and practitioners. Those schools are based on the model of a teaching hospital where academics and practitioners come together to develop the profession (McGee, 2001), and to provide models of exemplary practice for novices. Brink, Grisham, Laguardia, Granby, & Peck, (2001) reported that Professional Development Schools were developed in the expectation that increased collaboration between universities and teachers would lead to better experiences for student teachers, who would become better teachers, which would lead to improvement to children's learning. Flint, Kurumada, Fisher and Zisook (2011) described their experiences in a professional development school context where two teachers worked in a close and caring relationship with a team of university researchers. They concluded that progress was slow but said that over time there had been changes to the teachers' practice and to the professional environment of the school. The teachers in Snow-Gerono's (2005) study reported that they experienced collaboration and a sense of community through being part of a professional development school. There are various manifestations of the professional development school model and they are innovative and collaborative to different degrees, but the principle of bringing the practicum community together to learn with and from each other is at their core (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust & Shulman, 2005; Valencia et al., 2009).

Fullan (2007) identified five elements which are central to the success of learning communities. They are: "reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration and shared norms and values" (p. 148). In order for genuine learning to occur in communities there must be mutual respect so that members feel safe to take risks and to have their ideas challenged (Whitcomb, Borko & Liston, 2009). Humility and trust are important for working effectively in communities (Poskitt, 2005). Cameron and Mitchell (2002) claim that professional development through learning communities is most effective when there is active involvement from school leaders, the whole school is involved and there is external support from an adviser. Kennedy (2005) promoted the idea of communities of enquiry rather than communities of practice as a way of signalling the importance of teachers and academics focusing on promoting long term change.

Theories of professional learning indicate that there is a need to consider associate teacher professional development as a transformative contextualised activity involving the whole practicum community.

Improving the practicum experience for student teachers can be conceptualised as the difference between "restructuring" and "reculturing" (Hastings & Squires, 2002). Reculturing requires greater communication, greater understanding and a commitment to work towards shared goals (Allen et al., 2010; Koerner & O'Connell Rust, 2002; LaBoskey & Richert, 2002). This calls for greater understanding of the associate teacher point of view, more associate teacher involvement in initial teacher education programmes (Arnold, 2002; Kahn, 2001; Le Cornu, 2010), and joint inquiry between teacher education providers and associate teachers (Beck & Kosnik, 2000) in a climate of "trust, mutuality and reciprocity" (Le Cornu, 2009, p. 244).

The New Zealand context

The purpose of this research is to add to understandings of associate teachers working in New Zealand primary schools. Currently the New Zealand Teachers' Council is responsible for approving and regulating initial teacher education programmes and for the practicum and how it is managed. In recent times there have been indications that there will be changes in the way teacher education is conceptualised and delivered. In 2010 the New Zealand Ministry of Education published "*A Vision for the Teaching Profession*". That report outlines changes to initial teacher education that will require closer links between school and teacher education providers and a greater emphasis on mentoring trainee and beginning teachers. Timperley (2013) presented a paper for discussion which includes the claim that "While the practices generally espoused by associate teachers suggested that candidates would be exposed to quality learning experiences during their placements this was true for only a minority" (p. 4).

Previous studies in New Zealand have investigated aspects of the practicum. Grudnoff (2011) looked at how well the practicum prepared student teachers for beginning teaching and concluded that "participants' practicum experiences did not adequately prepare them for full-time teaching" (p.232). Haigh & Tuck (1999) explored the amount of agreement in evaluations of student teachers between secondary school associate teachers and visiting staff. Haigh, Pinder & McDonald (2006) investigated what student teachers learn while on practicum and what aids or detracts from their learning in that context. McGee (1996) looked at a number of primary student teachers and their experiences of conformity and compliance in the practicum, and Turnbull (2005) examined at student teacher professional agency in an early childhood hood practicum context. In an Ako Aotearoa research project, Starkey &

Rawlins (2011) examined the experiences of student teachers and their associate teachers during practicum.

The relationship between initial teacher education providers and schools has also been a research focus in New Zealand. Russell and Chapman (2001) wrote about the partnership effect of seconding classroom teachers to short term teaching contracts in College of Education. McGee's (2001) article looked to the professional development school model in the United States as a source of inspiration to develop new practicum partnerships between schools and universities in New Zealand. Harlow, Cooper & Cowie (2013) reported on a collaborative practicum model developed by the University of Waikato while Grudnoff & Williams (2010) and Villers & Mackisack (2011) described aspects of an alternative practicum model developed at the University of Auckland.

Some research on practicum and associate teachers is set in the context of secondary schools in New Zealand (Haigh & Ward, 2001; Haigh & Ward, 2002) however the secondary school practicum is quite different from the primary school context. In secondary schools student teachers may have several associate teachers and thus the associate teacher experience is different from that of an associate teacher in a primary school. There are New Zealand studies which examine what successful associate teachers do, (Ferrier-Kerr, 2003; Ferrier-Kerr 2009; McDonald, 2004; McDonald, 2009; McDonald, 2004; Sanders et al., 2005) and what they should do, (Sanders, 2005; Sanders, 2008; Timperley, 2001; Timperley et al., 2000; White, 2009) but the associate teachers themselves are not well represented in the literature.

In this study I have responded to the call for research in the field for the associate teachers themselves to add to the research literature (Sanders et al., 2005). I want to listen to associate teachers, to explore their experiences and to understand their realities. This interpretive, investigative case research is intended as a starting point to inform the future direction and organisation of practicum at this initial teacher education provider and to add to the practicum research literature related to primary teacher education in New Zealand.

Summary

I am mindful that "[r]esearch and/or literature review on effective professional development should be undertaken prior to any programme initiative to ensure that the approaches engaged are focussed on the right thing" (Piggot-Irvine, 2006, p. 478). This chapter has reviewed the literature related to the role of the associate teacher and has reported on the perspectives of the student teacher and the associate teacher. A range of interpretations of the process of learning to teach have been identified and related to perceptions of the role of the associate teacher. The limited literature related to the process of learning to be an associate teacher has also been reviewed and approaches to professional learning have been described.

CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the theory, the method and the methodology that was applied in this research and justifies those choices (Crotty, 1998). In doing so I have presented the theoretical perspective, the tools and the process that this research was built on. The purpose of this research is to explore associate teachers' thinking about their practices and their professional learning. In doing so I acknowledge that I bring my own individually constructed realities, understandings, and experience to this study. Conducting and writing research "are not neutral acts" (Charmaz, 2009, p. 130).

Methodology

Qualitative research

Qualitative research is generally concerned with people and how they understand their world. Stake (2010) describes qualitative research as "interpretive, experience based, situational and personalistic" (p. 31). Snape and Spencer (2003) state that qualitative research is used to provide a deep understanding of the participants by looking into their personal situations, their thoughts, their experiences, and their histories, described as "unpacking". Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that research can be qualitative to different degrees, but claims that common to all qualitative research is a concern with the social construction of reality.

Creswell's (2009) description of qualitative research is pertinent. In order to justify the approach that I have taken in this research I will examine some of these criteria as they apply to this study:

- Qualitative research tends to be field based.
  In carrying out this research I spent considerable time on the school research site over a year long period. It was important to me to be accessible to the teachers and I wanted the research to be set in the school environment to make the research as unobtrusive and natural as possible.

- The researcher is a key instrument in the research.

  In this project I was central to the research in many ways. I was the sole researcher. I designed the interview questions, carried out the interviews, facilitated the electronic discussions, supported the teachers, and wrote the field notes. All of the data gathering was done by me, the researcher.

- Qualitative research uses more than one source of data.

  In this research study the data comes from interviews, field notes, and transcripts of postings to Moodle discussions.

- Inductive data analysis.

  In analyzing the findings I developed the themes through a process of induction and deduction achieved by revisiting and reorganising the emerging ideas from the interview responses and the Moodle postings.

- Focus on the participants' meaning.

  I acknowledge the personal view that I have brought to this project and I have tried at all times to retain the integrity of the participants' perspectives.

- Emergent design.

  This study was deliberately designed to be responsive to the participants' needs in terms of timing content and direction. This qualitative research was also flexible in the way the data generation and data analysis were interwoven (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

- Holistic account.

  The research is interpretive by nature and endeavours to look at the many factors which impact on the associate teachers in the study in order to build a bigger picture from those findings. In positioning this study as qualitative research I was guided by the words of Harry Wolcott (1994) who said that:

  > One of the opportunities and challenges posed by qualitative research is to treat fellow humans as people rather than objects of study, to regard ourselves as humans who conduct research *among* rather than *on* them. (p. 20)

Individuals' perspectives are informed and shaped by their experiences and their interactions with others, so qualitative methodology is the most appropriate way of understanding the individual realities of the associate teachers in the study.

Good research design is driven by the need to answer the research questions in the most effective way (Flyvbjerg, 2006). For this research I have selected to use case study as my research design.

Case study

Yin (2003) uses case study as a broad term for research method, which encompasses the design, the data collection, and the data analysis. The decision to use this research approach influenced my perspective of the context in which the research took place and the decisions I made about data gathering.

This case study, in common with all case studies, is designed to increase understanding (Darke, Shanks & Broadbent, 1998; Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies are well suited to answering "how" or "why" questions (Yin, 2003) and are useful when looking at the real world (Buysse et al., 2003). Qualitative case study was adopted as the best means of answering my research questions because those questions are focused on understanding how the participants see themselves, how they think and what factors influence their thinking (Woodside, 2010).

Lewis (2003) suggests that case studies bring multiple perspectives on one context, in this instance the views of several teachers within one school. Looking at real-life situations in their everyday contexts is one of the defining features of case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). Case study is a tool for understanding the dynamics of one setting. This research investigated the experiences and understandings of a number of people within one setting. In effect this could be called a collective case study because each teacher's contribution adds to the understanding of the whole (Stake, 1995).

Case study is useful for looking closely at the specifics of one setting, but individual case studies can also add to understanding of larger phenomena. Mackey and Evans (2012) used case study methodology in their examination of professional learning through online learning

and learning communities. They claim that in their context, case study provided the opportunity for "inquiry into the nature, components, interrelationships and complexities of participants' experiences" (p. 491).

My choice of case study was also informed by the work of Sanders et al. (2005). They used case study methodology to investigate associate teachers' perceptions of their role, reasoning that it allowed them to approach the research in an open-minded way, to investigate their questions in the actual context, and to adapt their exploration as necessary. In this study the school is a case in itself but the individual experiences of each teacher comprise cases within a case.

The quality of case study research rests very much with the researcher. He or she makes the decisions that will determine whether the case study is high quality or not, according to the degree to which it is significant, recognises alternative perspectives, presents enough evidence, and is interesting (Yin, 2003. Analysis of case study research is challenging and is highly reliant on the integrity and rigour of the researcher's thinking (Yin, 2003). In considering how to analyse the data I have adopted the principles of grounded theory.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory is not a formula or a recipe; it is more a way of thinking which originated with Glaser and Strauss (1967). It emphasises the use of data to develop theory or abstractions as a way of understanding the complexities of the world. Inevitably there have been later interpretations of the original work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), and now the term grounded theory is used in a more generic sense (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The principles of grounded theory have been applied to this research but they have been further refined, and can be described as constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009) in accordance with a view of knowledge as subjective and of the world as a place of multiple realities.

Central to this revised view of grounded theory is an understanding of the researcher's perspective as an integral part of the research. It is important to locate the researcher throughout the research, including in the process of data analysis. Charmaz (2009) explains that there are:

multiple realities - and multiple perspectives on these realities. Data are not separate from either the viewer or the viewed. Instead, they are mutually constructed though interaction…. Thus constructivist grounded theorists see the representation of data - and by extension, the analysis - as problematic, relativistic, situational and partial. (p. 138)

In this way the researcher explores the perspectives of the research participants by endeavouring to immerse themselves in the data rather than only looking at it from the outside. I have done this by spending a lot of time in the school where the research was situated, by being available for informal individual conversations, through the interview process, through on-line discussions and in pre-arranged meetings with associate teachers, and in reflection while writing field notes. I gathered and processed the data formally and informally throughout the year of the study. At the time I was also involved in the school through my work for the initial teacher education provider, visiting student teachers and talking with teachers as I had for many years previously. In effect I was inside my own research questions (Middleton, 1996). I was immersed in the context as well as in the information gathering and I acknowledge the inevitable subjectivity of my analysis.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to self-reflection and self-disclosure (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this case my personal perspectives affected all aspects of the research process from the way it was structured to the conclusions that I reached and everything in between. The interpersonal nature of qualitative research in general, and case study research in particular, makes it inevitable that the researcher and the participants will impact on each other (Maxwell, 2009).

I have had a long association with the school research site at various times as pupil, relief teacher, and more recently as visiting lecturer for the initial teacher education provider. For over twelve years I was also the coordinator of a teacher education programme which placed large numbers of students at this school, and I have worked closely with staff as they hosted student teachers in their school and in their classes. Several of the teaching staff are graduates from the programme that I once coordinated and thus I have known them as both student teachers and associate teachers. I know the school and most of the staff well. Ensuring mutual trust was an important aspect of the project and over time there were many indications that this was genuine as teachers shared concerns and confidences with me.

It is also important to acknowledge reflexivity in data gathering and data analysis. In qualitative research the researcher is not separate from the research but is an integral part of it (Creswell, 2012). The researcher influences what participants say, for example, how they respond according to their perceptions of the researcher's viewpoint and whether they trust them enough to reveal their own feelings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Acknowledging reflexivity requires the researcher to be open, honest and reflective in describing the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and to describe the data analysis processes in detail, including how the researcher's position, interactions, and relationships have influenced their analysis (Charmaz, 2009). Accordingly, transparency and full disclosure within ethical constraints are features of this research.

Participatory research

The relationship between researcher and participants is integral to qualitative research (Stake, 2010). Mutual participation is a cornerstone of this research project, where the associate teachers and I were listening to and learning from each other as we engaged in professional conversations throughout the project.

A useful definition borrowed from the health sector claims that participatory research is "systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting change" (Cargo & Mercer, 2008, p.327). In education the term "participatory research" is more commonly linked to action research. I was influenced in my approach by the work of Vicki Carpenter and Colleen McMurchy-Pilkington (2007) in their participatory project *Te Whakapakari: Pouako me nga Akonga. The Strengthening: Learners and Teachers*. Their research was driven from the "bottom up" and schools and teachers selected the focus of their learning and then carried out their action research projects with support from the researchers as members of a "dialogical community, sharing their journeys and gaining strength from each other" (p. 4).

My research project was designed to be collaborative with the intention of facilitating reflection, but it is not action research. There was no deliberate intention to evaluate the associate teachers' actions, nor did I intend to report on the successfulness of the research initiative or meet outcomes. Rather the focus was on gaining understanding through the insights gained during our work together.

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2008), the features of participatory research are "shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action" (p. 273). Being collaborative and responsive, rather than directive, indicates that the researcher sees the participants as partners rather than as respondents.

Method

Context

In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, the information that I provide about the research setting excludes some details. The context for this study was what is, in New Zealand terms, a mid-sized school in a major population centre in the South Island of New Zealand. At the time of the research, the school had a staff of 31 including management, teaching staff, specialist teachers and ancillary staff. The school was chosen for two reasons. Most importantly this school very involved in hosting student teachers and most teachers in the school who were fully registered acted as associate teachers for several student teachers throughout each year. One reason for selection of the study school was that the teachers at the school had a considerable amount of associate teacher experience, and the associate teacher role was relevant to a large proportion of the staff. The second reason for selecting this school as a research site was that I had a long association with the school and that my presence was accepted as part of the wider school community. I had already established collegial relationships with most of the teachers.

Ethics

This research was intended to be consistent with the view of research as a respectful and ethical process with useful outcomes for the participants (Carpenter & McMurchy-Pilkington, 2007; Wideen et al., 1998). Many elements of the implementation involved collaboration and consultation with participants to monitor their well-being. As the researcher I wanted to give something to the participants in return for their time and input. My perspective is that teachers are busy people and extra demands on their time need to be carefully considered and appreciated. In return for their involvement I gave the teachers individual support and tangible gestures of thanks for participants and the wider school community. At the end of the formal research process, I hosted a celebration and provided refreshments.

Caring was a cornerstone of this project (King & Horrocks, 2010; Noddings, 1986). It was designed out of respect for the participants and their experiences. Issues of well-being and safety were significant as the intention was to explore and uncover personal understandings and perspectives. Associate teachers are potentially vulnerable in sharing their experiences and opening themselves up to scrutiny. Some of the teachers were not permanent staff members in the school and would be re-applying for jobs in the school, increasing their vulnerability. Care was taken to keep tapes and transcripts secure and to keep the content of conversations and interviews confidential. Throughout the implementation of the project, the analysis of the findings and the writing, the need to maintain the confidences of the participant teachers was of paramount importance to me and I mimimised the risk of identification of individuals by not using pseudonyms in the second findings chapter where identifying biographical information is presented.

The informed consent process was carried out in accordance with the University of Otago ethics procedures and approval was given by the University of Otago Ethics Committee. Participants were given written and oral information about the purpose of the research (See Appendix C) and the process, before being asked for informed consent (See Appendix D). Participants were told that they could withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice or disadvantage. The initial interviews were transcribed and written copies were given to the teachers for approval prior to data analysis.

Participants

I approached teachers as potential participants if they were employed full time for the whole year, were fully registered and thus complied with the New Zealand Teachers Council requirement that associate teachers hold full registration, and if they were going to be hosting a student teacher in their class for a prolonged period during the second half of the year of the study. Their student teachers were either in their final year of an undergraduate teaching degree or were part of the Graduate Diploma of Teaching Primary programme.

At the beginning of the year I invited eleven teachers to take part in both parts of the study and all agreed to participate. Two of those teachers left the school before the end of the year, therefore only nine teachers participated in the entire year-long research process. Another teacher returned to the school at mid-year and was included in the individual project

development phase of the study. His biographical information is not included. The teachers'
details are presented in Table 1. In that table, teachers are identified by number rather than the
pseudonyms used later in order that the anonymity of their responses is preserved.

Whole year	Gender	Years of teaching	Number of schools taught in	Years of AT experience
1	M	4	1	3
2	F	16	2	14
3	M	8	4	2
4	F	27	Many	15
5	M	11	1	10
6	F	33	3	20
7	M	13	4	13
8	M	10	1	8
9	F	5	3	5
Left the school during the year				
10	F	5	3	3
11	F	5	4	1

Table 1　　　　　**Demographic information**

There was a wide range of teaching experience among the teachers, from four years to thirty-
three. This variation was also reflected in the amount of time the teachers had been acting as
associates, from a beginner to someone with twenty years of experience. Among those who
completed the entire project, time spent as an associate teacher ranged from two to twenty
years prior to the year of the study. Most of the teachers had experience in a small number of
schools and many of them had been in their current school for most, if not all, of their
teaching careers up until that time.

Structure

Before I started this research I consulted with the school principal to discuss the relationship
between the initial teacher education provider and the school. The principal considered that
exploring their work with student teachers was an appropriate professional development focus
for the whole school. I offered to implement the professional development and explained that

if I did so, the project would be the basis of a Doctor of Education thesis. The principal was very positive about the possible benefits of the project for the school and a series of consultation meetings and communications followed in preparation for the implementation of the project.

At the beginning of the following year the professional development was outlined to all staff on a "teachers only" day – a day set aside for professional matters before the children start school. It was made clear to staff by the principal that they would all be expected to participate in the school-wide professional development in the first half of the year. That did not mean that all staff were required to participate in the research. In the meeting I outlined my research project and explained that I would be asking for participants from the teaching staff, and that those staff had the right to refuse to give consent to have their contributions included as data in my doctoral thesis. All teaching staff gave informed consent to be included but not all were eligible for inclusion under the criteria I had identified.

The first stage of the project was school-wide professional development about practicum and the role of the associate teacher and involved all of the teaching staff in the school. On-line discussion using Moodle (see below) was used to facilitate the project and I also ran some short sessions for teachers in staff meetings related to the role of the associate teacher. The second half of the year was centred on those teachers who had agreed to participate in the research and who met the criteria described earlier. This stage of the research required them to reflect on their practices and decide on an area that they wished to develop with support from me. This was intended to be an opportunity to address an area of concern or to focus on something that they wished to strengthen. There was no requirement that it be related to their work as associate teachers but the readings that they had done in the first half of the year were offered as an opportunity for reflection about the associate teacher role. The study was designed so that they were able to prioritise what they most needed and wanted to work on.

This thesis includes information from initial interviews with ten teachers because one of the original eleven teachers was unavailable for an initial interview. Thereafter it is informed by conversations and final interviews with the nine teachers who remained in the school and were involved in the entire process over the whole year and one who returned to the school mid-year.

In the first half of the year I acted as convener of the on-line discussions and I also did some presentations at staff meetings. I was also involved as a facilitator and support person throughout the year and made a point of being in the school on a regular basis, usually one day per week, to engage in casual conversation, answer questions, share ideas and resources and not least, to learn from the staff at the school. I kept a journal of field notes during the process documenting my reflections and the thoughts associated with this process.

Data collection

There is no one-size-fits-all way to undertake data collection (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Decisions must be aligned with the theoretical framework of the research and the method. Qualitative research generally involves four main sources of data; observation, interviews, documents, and audio-visual material (Creswell, 1998). Interviews are a common tool for data gathering in case study research (Yin, 2003). For that reason and also because this research was designed to explore the understandings and knowledge of associate teachers, the primary data gathering tool in this work was interviews.

Designing data collection also requires consideration of time frames including length of the study and the timing of data collection (Lewis, 2003). In this case the study spanned a school year and data collection was undertaken in initial interviews at the start of the year, in end of year interviews, through timetabled Moodle postings in the first half of the year, and through field notes at intermittent intervals. Table 2 summarises the data collection process.

February - March	July to December
10 teachers Initial interviews One not interviewed	Individual conversations about projects and field notes 10 teachers Nine original and one returned
February – July 11 teachers Moodle discussions 2 left at the end of term	**November-December** Final interviews 10 teachers

Table 2   **Data Collection**

Moodle discussions

Moodle is an open source on-line communication tool that was chosen as a mechanism for sharing readings and facilitating discussion about working with student teachers. All of the teaching staff in the school had school laptops for their individual use and during a staff meeting early in Term 1 they were taught how to access Moodle by me, with support from some staff who had expertise in that area. Thereafter they were supported individually as necessary. Teacher aide support staff did not have school laptops but were issued with user names and were invited to participate if they chose to and two of them made comments in one discussion.

In designing the project I wanted to minimise the demands on teachers while at the same time requiring them to reflect on their current practices. I remained deeply committed to facilitating and encouraging engagement on the premise that this is required for effective professional learning (Timperley et al., 2007).

In the first stage of the study participants were asked to contribute to electronic discussions using readings as a catalyst for reflection. The Moodle discussion topics were related to the research questions but were used as a secondary data source as an aid to understanding the perspectives of the participants. Moodle comments were not anonymous and some participants suggested that they felt constrained in those discussions in ways that they were not in individual interviews due to the public nature of Moodle.

Moodle was used as the communication tool with the expectation that it would be less of an imposition on teachers than asking them to attend meetings in person to discuss readings. The participants would be able to contribute from anywhere at any time that suited them. Moodle was also selected as a way of democratising the discussion so that no one voice would dominate, and contributors would have an equal opportunity to be 'heard' which is not always possible in a face-to-face setting. The readings were selected to give staff some research-based literature related to the role of the associate teacher. I chose the initial readings based on my perceptions of relevance, readability, and length with the busy lives of the teachers in mind. Later in response to requests from teachers, a New Zealand reading was included.

The research process was flexible and changes to plans were made when necessary. In consultation with the principal, the original timetable for monthly discussions was amended in recognition of the demands on teaching staff during school Term 1. The eventual timetable

consisted of five discussions during the first half of the school year. The intention at all stages was to minimise wasted time and to cause as little extra stress as possible for staff. This was a consistent priority for me and participants were able to signal when time was short or when they were unable to engage with the discussions. At the beginning of each discussion a research article was posted on Moodle along with an invitation to respond to it.

Timeline of discussions

Discussion 1: February - March

Reference: Ross, D. (2002). Cooperating teachers facilitating reflective practice for student teachers in a professional development school. *Education*, *122(*4), 682-688.

I selected this U.S. based research article as a first reading because it raises many relevant issues concerning reflective practice, the role of the cooperating (associate) teacher, the complexities of mentoring, and the need for professional development for those teachers. This relatively short article was chosen as a tool to aid the reflective process for teachers and as a gentle introduction for some, or re-introduction for others, to reading research articles.

Discussion 2: April - May (including school holidays)

Reference: Zeichner, K. (2002). Beyond traditional structures of student teaching. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 29*(2), 59-64.

This is an opinion piece from the U.S. which I selected to highlight issues related to the practicum and particularly to the role of the associate teacher. Zeichner provides a commentary on the political impact of the roles of the participants in teacher education and suggests that there is a need to question the status quo. Teachers were asked to read and respond to this article, reflecting on strategies for improving the practicum.

Discussion 3:

This was a regrouping exercise with no reading. Instead of posting on-line, I met with teachers in syndicate meetings and talked with them about the research process, offered encouragement and decided what our next steps would be. In those discussions with staff a request was made for readings from a New Zealand context, which teachers said would be more "relevant". The reading for Discussion 4 was selected for that reason.

Discussion 4: May - June.

Reference: McDonald, L. (2004). Effective mentoring of student teachers: Attitudes, characteristics and practices of associate teachers within a New Zealand context. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers Work, 1*(2), 85-94.

This article examines practices employed by associate teachers in New Zealand and endeavours to define the attitudes, characteristics and practices of successful associate teachers. It was chosen with the expectation that it would resonate with the participants, who were asked to answer questions about their engagement with the ideas in the article.

The prompt for this reading required the participants to consider that "associate teachers need to keep up to date in terms of professional knowledge, curriculum knowledge, learning and teaching styles and resources in order to be successful and effective associate teachers" (McDonald, 2004, p. 93). They were asked to respond to this and to comment on how confident they felt in that area. It also asked for comment on the role of the teacher education institutions in contributing to successful practicum experiences.

The second aspect of Discussion 4 presented a series of anonymous statements about associate teachers made by some student teachers who had been in the school some years previously. Participants were asked to respond to those.

Discussion 5: July - August

Reference: Margolis, J. (2007). Improving relationships between mentor teachers and student teachers: Engaging in a pedagogy of explicitness. *The New Educator, 3*(1), 75-94.

This article was chosen to stimulate reflection and discussion about professional development for associate teachers. It makes the point that good classroom teachers may not always be good mentors for student teachers and it documents a professional development initiative for mentor teachers. The participants were asked to record any points that they considered were important and/or interesting in relation to the role of the associate teacher.

Individual projects

The second part of the research involved me working individually with teachers who were hosting a student teacher in their class for a sustained period during the last half of the year. The purpose of the individual projects was two-fold. It was intended as a learning opportunity for the teachers and also for me. The teachers were being supported by me and in the process I was learning about their experiences and their priorities thought our conversations and the final interviews at the end of the year. This phase of the study began with individual conversations to begin to establish their priorities. I then worked with each teacher on an individual basis, providing resources as requested and engaging in professional conversations throughout the second half of the year. This work was driven by the teachers who determined what they wanted to achieve and how they might achieve it. I met with each teacher individually at least three times during the second half of the year and took field notes from our conversations.

Ten teachers undertook individual projects and of those, six were directly related to the teachers' work with student teachers. Giving feedback to student teachers was the focus of five of those six projects. The remaining four teachers chose to work on aspects of their personal teaching practice.

Interviews

Interviews are a useful tool for gathering information about individual experiences that cannot be observed. They are particularly valuable when the research is focused on understanding participant perspectives of their experiences (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Interviews can only provide representations of interviewees' realities (Silverman, 2011) but they are still a useful tool to gain access to the way people present their views of the world: therefore interviews were the best choice of data collection tool for this study because they allow participants to express their constructions of reality.

I adopted a semi-structured interview format for this study and this decision was made for several reasons. I was very conscious that the skill of the interviewer is of critical importance to effective interviewing (Patton, 2002), and the structure afforded by having questions prepared in advance gave me confidence and ensured that there were similar topics of conversation with all participants. I also believe that it is a gesture of respect to send the

question outline to the participants in advance in order that they can consider the questions before the interview. Furthermore, the intention of this research was for the teachers to share their thoughts and understandings openly and honestly and I felt that giving them time to think about the questions in advance could only be helpful in achieving that.

Semi-structured interviews also allow for comparison between the interview responses, although teachers express their beliefs in their own way (Patton, 2002). Fontana and Frey (2000) emphasise the importance of trust and familiarity with the world of the interviewee for successful interviews, and I have a history of positive working relationships with most of the participants. Thus the interviews were likely to be less formal than they might otherwise have been despite the semi-structured format, and potentially both parties were likely to be relatively unconstrained in their responses. The focus questions in the interview guide were developed from the research questions and from reading the research literature. I was particularly mindful of the work of Sanders, Dowson and Sinclair (2005) and the questions they asked in their investigation of the associate teacher role. In creating the questions for the interview guides I was mindful of using questions as a springboard for conversation rather than as an end in themselves. I was also prepared to move among the questions in a flexible way in anticipation of the fluidity of conversations rather than being tied to the order in the interview schedule. Throughout the interview process I tried to maintain a context where the interchange was natural and as much like a conversation as possible (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Silverman, 2011). With the permission of the teachers, the interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and I also took notes at the time. The interview guides for initial and final interviews are attached as Appendix C and D.

Initial individual interviews were held throughout school Term 1 and were conducted at times and in places chosen by the participants in order to meet their needs. Two interviews were conducted away from the school site. The time taken for the initial interview ranged from 20 to 40 minutes. Final interviews were carried out with all of the teachers who had participated in the second part of the research. Most of those interviews occurred on the school site late in the school year and they were shorter than the initial interviews. The questions in the initial interview guide were about the role of the associate teacher and their experiences in that role as well as their experiences of professional learning. The final interviews asked questions about their learning experiences during the year.

Case study research demands that the researcher looks closely and in depth at a case or cases. Asking for prolonged engagement, however, can be a problem for the ethical researcher (Stake, 1995). Ideally I would have liked to have an ongoing series of interviews with individual participants over the course of the year, but the intrusive and time consuming nature of multiple interviews made them hard to justify. Instead I made field notes based on informal conversations and observations as additional sources of data.

Field notes

Throughout the ten months of the study I recorded field notes during or after time spent in the school. This was part of my attempt to capture the lived reality of the school and the associate teachers' experience, to add to the other more formal data collection processes. I spent an average of 4 hours with each teacher during the professional learning phase of the study in Terms 3 and 4. The notes I took were informal and documented conversations, meetings, and observations as they occurred. They fill in the gaps, record aspects of informal discussion between formal data collection points, and document the everyday events and practicalities that occurred during the research (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

Mutch (2005) suggests that field notes can be descriptive, reflective, or analytic. I have used them in all of these ways. At times my notes were descriptive and at other times reflective as I recorded my interpretations of situations or interactions (Creswell, 2012). In general I have used field notes as a tool to help to understand the perspectives of the participants and they have also informed the findings and conclusions that I have drawn from the research.

Data analysis

Harry Wolcott (1994) describes the challenges of data analysis in qualitative research as a process of transformation of "unruly experience" into a convincing story. Central to my approach to data analysis was a commitment to pay due respect to the participants, telling their stories well and doing the best I could to present their views. I wanted to provide insights into the thoughts of the participants and to present them in a logical and interesting way.

A review of the literature suggests a diversity of ways to carry out data analysis in case study research (Darke et al., 1998). The researcher must adopt an approach to data analysis and

make it explicit, as analysis of case study data "depends on the investigator's own style of rigorous thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations" (Yin, 2003, p. 110).

Wolcott (1994) suggests three guiding principles for analysis of qualitative data:

- keep descriptive data to the fore,

- analyse carefully to identify what is important, and

- interpret by looking beyond the surface for deeper meanings.

Data analysis is iterative not linear and it requires the researcher to continually look back at what is appearing from the previous analysis as well as looking ahead to the next stage of analysis. In this research I approached the data from a Grounded Theory perspective using the constant comparative method of data analysis. Coding is the key component of qualitative data analysis (Glaser, 2001; Maxwell, 2009). Description, analysis, and interpretation in the context of grounded theory are described by Harry, Sturges and Klingner (2005) as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding where the researcher moves from identification of events to identifying categories and then to making links to create the story told by the data. Open coding is the process by which data is broken down and compared. Axial coding refers to the process of relating codes to each other and selective coding refers to unifying all of the categories around the central core category. Pandit (1996) describes these three coding stages as developing concepts, categories and propositions. Grounded theory places coding is at the heart of the analytic process and analysis is "grounded" in the data as concepts emerge. (See Appendix A)

A constructivist interpretation of grounded theory acknowledges the role of the researcher in constructing the coding categories rather than having them emerge fully formed from the data (Charmaz, 2009). In contrast Glaser (2002) claimed that data analysis within a qualitative case study tradition should proceed on the understanding that participants tell the researcher their views and how to interpret them. He suggested that researchers should not add their own interpretation of those views as it is intrusive and unwarranted. From a constructivist perspective I believe that it is inevitable that data analysis will be both inductive and deductive and that the analysis will involve mutual construction.

Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor (2003) provide the analytic hierarchy which I employed as a structure for approaching the data. The process of analysing qualitative data, they say, is iterative and involves sorting, summarising, identification, and explanation. In this study the raw data provided by interviews, Moodle postings, and field notes were re-examined to ensure that I became very familiar with it before beginning the formal process of analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). The process of sorting it had really begun very early, almost involuntarily, as I transcribed the initial interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) as I began to develop shared meanings about a context with which I was already familiar. The Moodle postings gave deeper and different insights into the teachers' understandings about their role in working with student teachers which helped me to understand them better and over time I deliberately became increasingly absorbed in the data. As the year progressed I had several meetings with each teacher and the field notes which resulted from our conversations about their learning priorities further informed my thinking about their perspectives on both the learning project and how they see themselves. The final interviews required some reflection and gave another opportunity for teachers to help me to understand their views. Thus all of the data sets aided me in constructing a picture of each individual and their ways of knowing the world.

The initial interviews allowed the teachers to reflect on the questions that had been raised and they then had the opportunity to bring their on-going reflections into their Moodle discussions. The discussions enabled the teachers to continue to think about the role of the associate teacher and perhaps to modify or amend their ideas. The informal interviews throughout the second half of the year also encouraged on-going reflection.

I read and took notes, summarising what had been said in interviews and recording significant comments and any initial themes that I could see. This inductive approach ensured that I was engaged in close reading of the text and it allowed me to uncover common or important themes as they appeared from the raw data (Glesne, 1999). Yin (2003) advocates the value of manipulating or "playing" with the data in the early stages of analysis. I made a table of summary statements from interviews and Moodle data from each participant and manipulated those as another way of viewing the data.

As I analysed the data my entry point was the research questions. The concepts which came from the research questions were that associate teachers have a view of their role and that there are reasons for those views. The other area for investigation was teachers' prior

experiences of professional learning and whether teachers are able to articulate their preferences. Concepts were identified in the data by extracting individuals' ideas and their contexts comparing them and then identifying commonalities which were identified and recontextualised (Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl, 2003).

My description of the process employed here makes it appear chronological and linear. In reality it was more like that described in Glesne (1999), where the ideas and analysis developed and percolated over time and often appeared during the business of daily living. Grounded theory is enacted as analysis of each participant's contributions looking at critical incidents as well as repeated patterns, and then examining the relationship between them, in effect celebrating the uniqueness of each person as well as the common themes which emerged.

Trustworthiness

Generalisability is a term that is used in various ways in research. In quantitative research it refers to the likelihood that the findings of a research study will apply to the wider population. In the social constructionist tradition, qualitative research is defined by the degree to which is it credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 1986Initial. Patton (2002) argues that trustworthiness can also be determined by the way in which the research is conducted, the researcher's credibility and the degree of commitment to qualitative ways of working. Not all researchers are committed to the worth of the idea of triangulation in the context of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that the term is vague and Silverman (2011) advises that clear descriptions about what took place are the most useful proof of credibility.

Stake's (1995) approach to trustworthiness in case study research suggests that it requires more than good intentions and intuition and that discipline is necessary to ensure a good case. He later suggested that triangulation is necessary to make sure that the result is clear, meaningful, non-biased and accurate (Stake, 2006). This view is problematic for the constructionist researcher and has required some consideration in the context of this study. I have addressed the issue of credibility from the perspective of reflexivity, transparency and positionality (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011) by being open in declaring my place in the

research context, my theoretical stance and acknowledging the inevitability of my constructions in the data analysis process.

This research involved several data collection tools. This can be seen as one way to increase the credibility and triangulation of the interpretations that I have drawn (Stake, 1995). In this case the field notes that I made based on observations and conversations with the associate teachers were able to be compared with what they said in their interviews. To a lesser degree this also applies to their Moodle postings but as described earlier, these were possibly not dependable as a source of honest opinion and were used in a limited way in data analysis.

I also used what Bratlinger et al. (2005) describe as first level member checks where I took the transcripts of the initial and final interviews to the teachers and left them with them so that they could check them for accuracy. "Audience review" (Patton, 2002, p. 561) is another credibility check which has been applied in this study. This was a requirement when presenting my research proposal for approval to a team of examiners and has been ongoing through conversations with my thesis supervisors, my doctoral cohort, and my professional community. Stake (2006) justifies this view by saying that:

> We learn many things from knowledgeable people, but we need also to know what they can see is wrong with the view we are reporting. We need to get almost as many of them as we can find time for to have them read parts of our manuscript, urging them to find fault, obligating them to say what the conclusions mean to them. The process of triangulation occurs throughout the fieldwork and analysis. It means being redundant and sceptical in seeing, hearing, coding, analyzing and writing. It benefits from discussion with both critical insiders and outsiders. (p. 77)

Throughout this research I have been willing to open up the research process to scrutiny in order to allow it to be judged (King & Horrocks, 2010) by presenting at conferences and speaking with colleagues. In doing so I recognise that I am part of the research because of my personal life experiences as student teacher, visiting lecturer, associate teacher, and practicum coordinator. Throughout I have been involved in co-constructing the interviews, interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions and I have tried to be respectful, ethical and clear in the way that I have presented this work.

Summary

In this chapter I have described and justified the theory, methodology and methods that were used in this qualitative case research, which is designed to explore the world of the associate teacher, and to make their perspectives visible to others, in an environment of trust and respect. In doing so I have worked within a qualitative research tradition and have described the participants and the research tools I used to reflect that position.

CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS - BEING AN ASSOCIATE TEACHER

In the two findings chapters that follow I have presented associate teacher responses to the research questions and have done some preliminary discussion of the findings. In this chapter I have summarised what the associate teachers said in relation to research questions one and two - How do associate teachers see their role? and What informs associate teachers' perceptions of their role? This chapter identifies themes that have emerged from the associate teachers and makes links to research from the literature review. I have organised the views of the associate teacher role that the teachers described in interviews and Moodle postings, using frameworks from research literature.

How do associate teachers see their role?

The teachers in this study were largely positive about working with student teachers and about their school environment, suggesting that student teachers in the school could see, in Kelvin's words, a "pretty good programme'' and that the school had a "professional attitude" towards student teachers. In initial interviews at the start of the year many of the nine teachers who were interviewed said that hosting student teachers was beneficial to their own practice. One aspect of this was described by Irene, who remarked that having a student "helps me to be clearer about what I'm doing … and it makes me more organised". She also referred to the boost in confidence it gave her professionally to realise that the things she does and takes for granted are appreciated by student teachers. Clare said that having a student helps her to define her teaching philosophy further, and Tania appreciated the opportunity to watch someone (the student teacher) who doesn't teach the way that she does. Student teachers were also valued for the resources that they develop and share with associate teachers and for providing opportunities for, in Barry's words, "learning new strategies from them" (Barry). The potential for reciprocity in the practicum is highlighted in the research literature (Landt, 2004; Russell & Russell, 2011) and some of the teachers were aware of this.

The presence of a student teacher was viewed in a positive light by Naomi, who saw student teachers as helpful and commented:

> It is to the benefit to the kids I think you know having those numbers in the class is excellent, especially when you've got like numeracy groups and things like that and reading groups. I think the kids get a really good deal.

On the other hand, Nick was concerned about the negative impact of student teachers, particularly if the student teacher was not "up to it". He was worried that in that situation the "kids might not be getting such a fair deal". Anne was also frustrated by instances of "the children acting out for the student teacher". Management of children's behaviour was a recurring concern throughout the study and was obviously important to these teachers.

All of the teachers in this study wanted their student teachers to do well. Of the ten teachers interviewed at the start of the year, all but one identified student teacher success as the most personally satisfying thing about being an associate teacher. They liked seeing student teachers learning and enjoying their classes, acting on the advice they had given them, and having success as a result. Barry commented that he wanted to see student teachers "teaching your class, actually really enjoying it and having fun", and Kelvin described a good student teacher teaching their class as watching their "gems going to someone who polished them" (Kelvin). Clare echoed the sentiments of many of the associate teachers in the study when she said that "it's really satisfying and really exciting just knowing that there are teachers out there that have learned something from me". The teachers had a sense of "satisfaction" and "ownership" in their work (Hastings, 2004) and saw themselves contributing in a positive way to the development of student teachers.

Importance of Relationships

Consistent with the research, forming relationships with student teachers was important to all of the associate teachers (Graham, 2006; Haigh et al., 2006; Hastings, 2004; Kim & Danforth, 2012). Diane summed up the feelings of many of associate teachers when she said "I really love the relationships you build … you know all that kind of collegial stuff". Many of the teachers could clearly recall student teachers that they had worked with in the past and spoke about them with affection and respect. Conversely, some teachers such as Kelvin, spoke of student teachers who he was "glad to see the end of". Diane said that sometimes she can be surprised when she meets a student teacher "who you have summed up in the first five minutes and think, oh God this is going to be hard and they suddenly understand and you think, wow where did that come from?"

Sim (2011) investigated the emotional impact of working as an associate teacher and concluded that working with student teachers can be a source of tension and this was referred to by some of the teachers in this study. Disrespectful student teachers were one source of frustration. Several of the associate teachers however, were at pains to distinguish between those students and students who were weak. Clare described the struggles and frustrations of working with a student who was able to plan fabulous lessons but "just couldn't deliver them". She also commented that a "struggling student tends to be someone who wants to be better" but those that "tend to know it all" are a problem. Diane observed that students like that are rare but when you do meet them "you just want to shake them and say look mate, I've done this job for a long time. You need to listen because if you don't listen you're not going to learn". Nick explained his strategy for dealing with those students as letting them "crash and then when they sort of wake up and go why did that happen, then you can say, well it's because we have been telling you this but you haven't been taking it on board". These comments indicate that the associate teachers saw themselves in control of the practicum and believed that they are charged with teaching the student teacher the lessons they need to learn, including humility.

Assessment

In this initial teacher education programme, associate teachers are consulted as part of the assessment decision making and they write summative reports, but final decisions about assessment are made by the teacher education provider staff. The role of the associate teacher in assessment of student teachers was raised as a challenging area for some associate teachers in this study, who wondered about consistency and criteria for assessment. This is consistent with comments from Clarke et al.'s (2013) literature review where they identified assessment as a problem for associate teachers. Tania expressed her concerns about how to gauge student teacher achievement when she said:

> You do evaluate their [student teacher] performance on your own expectations and experience. Having said that, this is the only true measure you have to go on. Is there a need for this to become more consistent or is it fine the way it is?

Assessment of student teachers highlighted a problem for some of these associate teachers, because of what they saw as a lack of information about expectations of student teachers. There were also concerns that final judgements about students at risk may not be valid or

reliable if they were made by a visiting lecturer, rather than the associate teacher. Diane said that "if classroom teachers flag someone who is really battling then College should listen". Anne gave an example of a situation where a student teacher who was causing concern had an extra observation visit from a senior staff member from the provider institution. The staff member:

> came out and observed her and she had everything there that day … her folders were pristine and yeah and she did this wonderful lesson, and … that wasn't the reality …. She certainly pulled her socks up for that day, but she hadn't bothered before then. When I asked to see her folder it wasn't a big enough threat.

Diane voiced the same sentiments when she said:

> …although tutors come in and watch they're only watching a snapshot and it's a performance rather than a real day in many cases, and often there's a teacher hovering somewhere close so sometimes it's not very realistic.

These comments illustrate what associate teachers see as a lack of support and the absence of shared understandings about their role. This is a concern because Hall et al. (2008) state that "confusion about roles and responsibilities undermines efficacy" (p. 343). The teachers in this study have suggested that they have concerns about assessment of student teachers. Most of them thought that associate teachers should have a greater role in assessment and in controlling entry to the profession.

Lack of cohesion

The challenges of meeting both school and initial teacher education provider requirements were sources of frustration. The student teacher view was described in a New Zealand study by McGee (1996), who found that many student teachers were caught in a "no win" situation where the curriculum teaching requirements of their initial teacher education programme did not fit with school or syndicate long term planning. This was raised by several of the associate teachers in this study and is an example of the difficulties they have in trying to align their roles and responsibilities for children's learning, the requirements of the school, and the needs of the student teacher. Kelvin observed that in his experience student teachers impact on children's learning in the classroom in a particular way. He said that "Sometimes the timing of when the student is in the classroom doesn't suit the programme you know… good students teach well but they teach slower".

David sympathised with the student teachers and said:

> they tell me that they've got to do this this, and this … and it doesn't fit in … with the school, what the class is doing and sometimes they get a bit upset … because the … person who is going to come and observe them's gonna say well where's this?...

These are examples of the some of the difficulties student teachers and associate teachers face as a result of the lack of cohesion between the initial teacher education provider and the classroom. This is not specific to the New Zealand context and is widely recognised internationally (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Koc et al., 2009; Van Nuland, 2011).

The presence of a student teacher can have an impact on the classroom programme while they are there, but also when they go. One aspect of the associate teacher role was identified as rebuilding the classroom culture when the student teachers leave. Clare had concerns about changes to the tone of the classroom when student teachers are in charge. She commented:

> let's be honest, it does disrupt your classroom …. You know if you've got to give up your classroom for four weeks to a student no matter how good you know you've got a good two weeks work after that to catch up and get them back into shape again.

Clare was not alone in these concerns. Kelvin said that when there are a lot of student teachers taking over classes, it changes the tone of the school in the playground and in the physical environment. He suggested "talk to the caretaker. He knows when students are in the school."

The complexities of the associate teacher role are evident in the literature internationally (Balch & Balch, 1987; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Hall et al., 2008) and in New Zealand (Haigh, 2001; McDonald, 2004). Stanulis and Russell (2000) wrote that "if classroom teachers are to be partners in the education of student teachers, a clear conception of this role needs to be articulated" (p. 65). Because there are so many ways of interpreting the role of the associate teacher it is important to investigate the perceptions of individual associate teachers, particularly as research suggests that "mentor teachers have predetermined conceptions of their role as mentors" (Hall et al., 2008, p. 329).

Findings from this study indicate that associate teachers were largely positive and enjoyed working with most student teachers and want them to succeed. There are, however, challenges

in their work. Sinclair et al.'s (2006) large investigation revealed that the teachers in their study chose to work with student teachers because they had a commitment to the development of student teachers and the profession.

Ways of interpreting the associate teacher role

Many researchers have suggested frameworks for conceptualising the role of the associate teacher (Balch and Balch, 1987; Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997; Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008) and I have used these as a way of presenting the findings of this study. Following Clarke et al. (2013) the associate teacher role can be conceptualised as a continuum showing levels of associate teacher participation in the practicum.

Low participation   High participation

Absentee landlord   Overseer   Coach
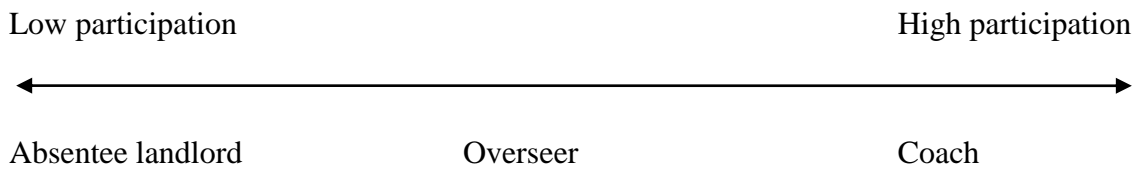
Figure 2.   **Associate teacher role continuum 1**

This model interprets the associate teacher role in terms of their degree of participation in the practicum setting, from leaving the student teacher alone, to looking on as a supervisor, to working alongside them in their practice. Similarly a continuum model was also used by Valencia et al. (2009) (see Figure 3). They positioned one end of their continuum as learning to teach by following the associate teacher model. Further along the continuum they describe associate teachers who provide little support, in the expectation that student teachers will learn by trial and error, and at the other end they place associate teachers who take a deeper, more "conceptual" view of their role. Their study indicated that very few teachers fell in this final category.

Mimetic work   Experimentation   Benign neglect   Conceptually reflective
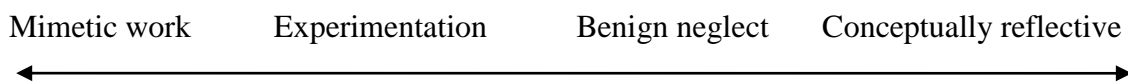
Figure 3.   **Associate teacher role continuum 2**

I have developed my own continuum from the themes that emerged from my findings (see Figure 4) and have positioned the apprenticeship model (Beck & Kosnik, 2000) at one end and the facilitative educative mentor (Balch & Balch, 1987; Rajuan et al., 2008) at the other.

This category was used to position comments which indicated that the role of the associate teacher is to direct the student teacher to do what they tell them to do. Comments which indicated a more reciprocal view of the role of the associate teacher were categorised as mentoring (Butler & Cuenca, 2012), and at the other end of the continuum, comments which referred to facilitating student teacher learning were categorised as educative mentor (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b)

Apprenticeship   Mentoring   Educative mentor
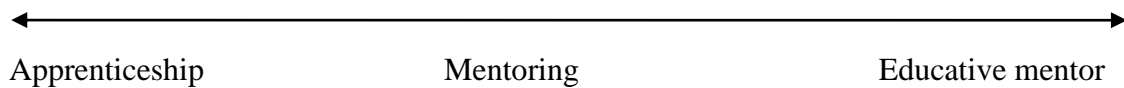
Figure 4.   **Associate teacher role continuum 3**

The associate teachers in this research made comments which ranged across the categories, although there were some teachers who were more inclined to one perspective than another. Four of the teachers viewed the associate teacher more as director of the apprenticeship while two clearly indicated that they were more inclined towards the mentor category.

Apprenticeship

In applying the framework to comments made by the associate teachers in this study it was apparent that the majority of teacher comments belonged to the "associate teacher as model" or "apprenticeship" end of the continuum (Grudnoff & Tuck, 2003; Valencia et al., 2009). This perspective emphasises the craft knowledge of teaching (Grundoff & Tuck, 2003) and the role of the associate teacher as master craftsperson.

Nick was explicit about his position when he said in his final interview that learning to be a teacher is like "entering an apprenticeship". He said that "we are the people who are going to be shaping the new generation of teachers", suggesting that the responsibility for the outcomes of teacher education programmes lies with the associate teachers in the schools.

This view is consistent with a large number of comments which suggest that the associate teacher is responsible for the practicum experiences of student teachers. Almost all of the participants described the role of the associate teacher in terms of associate teacher actions. These included giving feedback, role modelling and checking planning.

Providing feedback is an important aspect of the associate teacher role (Clarke et al., 2013) and in this study giving feedback was the most commonly identified role of the associate teacher. In the final interviews, eight of the ten teachers who were involved in the second half of the year, said that giving feedback is part of the associate teacher role, one more than in the initial interviews. This is consistent with much of the research literature which shows that associate teachers see feedback to be at the heart of their role (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; McDonald, 2004).

Most of the teachers indicated that they understood giving feedback in terms of an expert associate teacher observing a novice student teacher working with a class and commenting on the student teacher's performance after the event. Tania described this as giving constructive criticism. The associate teachers felt that feedback comments could be oral or written and several teachers worried that they did not put enough feedback in writing. In their literature review, Clarke et al. (2013) claim that, in general, associate teachers are more confident and more likely to provide oral than written feedback. This was confirmed by Barry who said:

> I do really well verbally with my students but the written feedback during observations and that, I sort of rely too much on the students taking down the notes after each lesson whereas sometimes I think the written feedback will help them when they reflect back on it.

Written feedback was seen as very important and was highlighted by many of the teacher participants as a source of guilt, as this was something they needed to do more of. David summarised the feelings of many when he said "that's all part of being an associate, giving that written feedback".

Although they were sure that feedback was important, some of these associate teachers were uncertain about what was required and this was challenging for them. Concerns about lack of clarity regarding expectations of feedback were also raised by associate teachers in Australia (Nielsen et al, 2010). Diane said that she would like to know "what sort of feedback you [the initial teacher education provider] want us to give … cause whatever feedback we give them might not be very valuable", and Anne said that as an associate teacher she would like to know "what kind of structures you wanted us to go into". Barry also wanted clarification of:

> what is expected feedback wise to the students, how much, too much, too little? You know sometimes you can get carried away and give pages and pages and

pages. So I have sort of developed that over, just over the years of keeping it very simple for them, to just little steps, a couple of things to work on because you can quite easily leave a student feeling demoralised.

David wanted the initial teacher education provider to supply information about what the student teachers had already achieved prior to coming to his class. He felt this would be helpful to make sure that he was providing next steps for them and asked for "something that will give us guidelines, or they tick right I need help or I need some more management, or my planning .... So where they're at from their last posting or just where to next".

Good feedback is based on clear and transparent criteria and some of the teachers were concerned about the quality of the feedback that they were giving to student teachers. Clare said that she needed to be more specific about what she wrote because "when I looked at it, it could be quite difficult for students to find out what I was actually saying they need to work on". Nick and Dean were also concerned with improving the content of their feedback to student teachers.

In summary, providing feedback for student teachers was clearly identified as an important part of the role of the associate teacher and many of these teachers said that they could improve their practices in this area. They were trying to apply the formative assessment practices that they used with children to their work with student teachers, but they wanted and needed more direction to help them to do so. They indicated that they wanted more information about how to give feedback, how much feedback to give, and what to focus on when giving feedback. In this study the associate teacher comments suggest a degree of uncertainty about progressions of student teacher learning and a desire to work more closely with the initial teacher education provider.

Clarke et al. (2013) claim that from their literature review they can see that modelling is expected as part of the associate teacher role. Several of the teachers in this study commented that the associate teacher role requires them to be expert and to share their expertise with student teachers, which they described as role modelling. This is consistent with findings from the "maestros" in Graham's (2006) study and from Koerner and Rust (2002) who found that all of their participants - student teachers, associate teachers and visiting lecturers - saw role modelling as the primary function of the associate teacher .

The term role modelling was used in various ways by the teachers in this study. Anne referred to role modelling in relation to associate teachers as expert practitioners who "answer questions", while Naomi used the term to describe modelling "strategies with the class on behaviour, teaching groups" and "how to run a programme". Barry, on the other hand, referred to role modelling as showing student teachers a model of professional behaviour, "that you are organised with your resources so that you are modelling that behaviour to them … because they will feed off you. They will just pick up off your vibe and your teaching style". Anne also referred to modelling appropriate teacher behaviour for student teachers and said that associate teachers need to be "professional role models".

For some teachers, role modelling referred to maintaining currency in their teaching and demonstrating good teaching practice. Clare was concerned that "some associate teachers just don't demonstrate good practice consistently ... and I think it's not helpful for students to see that". Naomi had similar views and commented on the need for associate teachers to be "up with current practice to be able to model lessons" for their student teachers. Irene agreed and emphasised the need for associate teachers to be familiar with the "latest things coming in…" and Tania said that they needed to "know the curriculum". Diane, a very experienced teacher and associate teacher, warned that associate teachers should not "bumble along here and teach a class and never change the way you are…you need to be up with current practice. You can't be an old fogey". Maintaining a positive attitude to on-going learning in order to grow and develop as a teacher, was something that many of these ATs felt they needed to model for student teachers.

Not all of the teachers in this study saw the associate teacher role as that of "expert". David said that in his view this is not realistic and that it is important to make student teachers aware that they are in a real classroom and "it's not going to be perfect". He said that he makes a point of telling his student teachers that he is not the greatest teacher in New Zealand and that we all make mistakes and change. In his final interview Kelvin described this perspective well. He summarised his position on the associate teacher as expert by stating:

> if you're honest with your strengths and weaknesses, don't be shy about that, you will find, unless you've got an idiot on the other end, your student rates that … they don't have to be perfect and you're certainly not.

He also said that there had been debate among the staff on this point and that some other teachers thought that "an associate is a professional person, who is a neutral figure to a degree, that's showing a variety of skills, where at the end of the day they can point somebody to the skills they need to get".

Kelvin disagreed strongly with that view. His personal perspective did not fit well with the apprenticeship model and there were others who expressed similar thoughts. Irene commented that although associate teachers need to be strong teachers, "some teacher strengths aren't in maybe paperwork and things like that but they've got other skills they bring". She was suggesting that individual teachers have different strengths but that they all have things to offer student teachers.

There were distinct differences of opinion among these teachers about the role of associate teacher as expert. There is evidence in the literature that student teachers expect associate teachers to model best practice (Haigh & Ward, 2004; Koerner & Rust, 2002), and although many of the associate teachers were adamant that this was an essential part of their work, some of them were equally adamant that it is not. This dissonance is symptomatic of a lack of clarity about the associate teacher role. These teachers have formulated their own views based on their experiences and their personal inclination (Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005; Stanulis & Russell, 2000).

Another aspect of the associate teacher role mentioned by several teachers was what they referred to as "checking students' planning". Nick said that that this is an important task but said that he struggles "finding time to really thoroughly check their planning... you know you go over it to a certain point but sometimes you are quite busy so you look at it and you think that looks all right but...".

Clare and Anne also commented on planning checks. They described these as a compliance exercise where students submit their planning for approval to their associate teacher before they are allowed to teach. Clare said:

> I guess I get frustrated when a student is supposed to teach for a day or a block or something like that and they come with a floppy bit of paper and say this is my plan, and I think oh for God's sake, but I find I tend to say this is not good enough, we need to sit down and rehash that. Maybe I'd be better saying, well you are not teaching today ….

Anne had also had problems with a student teacher who did not comply with her expectations about planning. She said:

> I did once have a second year student and she just was saying to me, oh my printer wasn't working, I couldn't print these out, and so I printed it and I thought …It was like my dog ate my homework.

Checking planning was raised as a problem, and the examples the teachers gave were obviously significant events and were remembered clearly. Those anecdotes are indicative of the emotional intensity that can be part of the associate teacher role, particularly when working with student teachers who are perceived as 'difficult' (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Hastings, 2004). The comments are further illustrations of a view that the associate teacher is in charge of the practicum and the student teacher is powerless and must be compliant in order to gain entry to the profession (Devos, 2010).

The majority of the participants mentioned supporting student teachers as one aspect of the associate teacher role, in common with findings in the research literature (Hall et al., 2008; Mitchell et al., 2007; Sinclair et al., 2006). In this study support was described in various ways. Some teachers indicated that they saw the associate teacher role as that of a caring, experienced practitioner concerned with protecting less experienced novices. Diane gave an example from her experience when she said:

> if you know you've got a really tricky kid that you find really hard to work with yourself you've got to be prepared to take that child away with you…. Because if you can't ... if you find it hard … how the heck will the student manage? So you have to make professional judgments as far as that's concerned, and I think I do that, and I'll support my students completely.

Clare's vision of support focussed on helping student teachers to learn from experience. She commented that the associate teacher role should include:

> supporting students when they're not 100% sure or confident without taking over … letting them sink or swim and then bailing them and … saying 'well let's have a look at that' and saying 'why did that happen?' so that they actually understand.

Support on a personal level was highlighted as an important part of the associate teacher role. Anne gave an example of a situation where she protected a student teacher who was being harassed by a parent, while Clare said that she was "a good friend if that's what they need. I'll

be there for them. I feel that they'll tell me if things are not going well in their flat or at home if they're not 100% well".

In contrast the role of the associate teacher as a friend was a challenge for Tania. She felt that she might not be professional enough as an associate teacher and might be too close to her student teachers. Anne also indicated that being a friend was not how she saw the role of the associate teacher and gave an example of an experience with a student teacher. She commented that:

> Her and I were polar opposites in personality but I think she was just wonderful as a teacher…. We didn't share the same interests outside of school … as opposed to some students that I've got on really well with, but she was just … I couldn't fault her.

Most of the teachers identified their personal strengths as associate teachers in terms of care and support. Kim and Danforth (2012) suggest that the metaphors that cooperating teachers unconsciously use to describe their work with student teachers reveal their approach to the supervision of student teachers. One teacher saw herself as a "mother hen" and the student teachers she had worked with in the past as "chicks", suggestive of a parental perspective (Haigh, 2001). Anne said that she was "protective" while Nick was concerned that student teachers achieve "life balance", and David was conscious of not "throwing them in the deep end". These comments are consistent with findings from Sim's (2011) Australian study where the associate teachers described their mature female students as "girls". They suggest that some of the associate teachers see the practicum relationship as a benevolent hierarchy where student teachers are junior to them.

In the initial interviews four of these associate teachers clearly described their role as an expert, teaching and inducting a novice who is less knowledgeable and less experienced. Clare encapsulated this view when she said that if she has a student teacher who thinks they know it all, she sits them down like your student in your class and says "listen, you are here to learn". This view was not held by all of the associate teachers, or even consistently by Clare who later said that part of the associate teacher role is "letting them into your thinking rather than telling them how to do it".

Mentoring

In this study I have chosen to use the term mentoring to categorise comments which suggest a less hierarchical view of the associate teacher role (Brandenburg, 2004; Le Cornu, 2005). The term is ambiguous and can be interpreted in many ways but here I am using it to signal a shift from the associate teacher as supervisor to a more collaborative relationship (Le Cornu and Ewing, 2008; McDonald, 2009).

Acknowledgement of student teachers as legitimate members of the practicum setting was evident when Diane posted in Moodle about the need for mutual respect between associate teacher and student teacher, for being honest not defensive, and for thinking about the classroom as something that is shared. The associate teacher role was described by other teachers in terms of honesty, partnership, respect and recognition of the needs of the two parties involved.

The partnership perspective suggests that facilitating student teacher reflection is an important part of the associate teacher role. Nick described this as associate teachers helping student teachers to "recognise their own strengths", while David and Irene suggested that their role required them to help student teachers to set goals for themselves. David commented that he was committed to "letting them reflect, not me telling them".

These comments suggest a view of the associate teacher as more than a coach telling the student teacher what to do, signalling awareness that the role requires a more collegial approach to their work (Hall et al., 2008). Their comments indicate an understanding of the individual nature of student teachers and a commitment to work 'with' them rather than working 'on' them.

During the year the role of the associate teacher was increasingly described as a reciprocal relationship with an emphasis on partnership. Naomi commented at the end of the year that:

> I think it's actually more, not only as a model, but it's got to be two-way for them
> to give us feedback, I mean before I thought it was me doing everything ... you
> know just watch me and learn from me … I think now that I feel I can ask them
> what you think I should be doing.

The use of the term "we" in describing the role of the associate teacher, suggests partnership and collaboration with a student teacher. Barry's comments illustrated this well when he said that:

> When things go wrong in their lesson and we've planned it together … I've got to take responsibility for that as well … and go through that. If we've identified something that they need to work on and it's still going wrong, then we probably need to develop some other strategies to think again.

Diane's view of partnership was rather different. She said that:

> I've always thought the role of the associate teacher was an important one and I've always looked at it as a partnership because I think that sharing your classroom with another person, it has to be, it has to be a positive experience, you have to both want to do it or else it'd be hell on earth, because really, there's nothing worse than watching someone stuff up your class.

Her comments suggested that her view of partnership was about sharing *her* class rather than working together in a collaborative way and might be better included as evidence of the apprenticeship model.

Educative mentor

In research related to mentoring provisionally registered teachers, the New Zealand Teachers' Council (2011) states that educative mentoring happens "when an experienced colleague provides dedicated time to a PRT to guide, support, give feedback and facilitate evidence-informed, reflective learning conversations" (p. 10). In this study the educative mentor category is premised on the principle that an associate teacher who is acting as an educative mentor is supporting student teacher learning in order to empower them and to equip them for the future (McDonald & Flint, 2011). In this study there were few comments made that illustrated this view of the associate teacher role.

One teacher suggested that the associate teacher role is to support student teachers to develop their own style in their own way. Tania said that associate teachers should give student teachers "the freedom to teach and be themselves", while Kelvin said that they should allow their student teachers "independence".

From the educative mentoring perspective, support can be interpreted as professional support to allow the student teacher to take the initiative. This was important to Irene who said that her strength as an associate teacher was in making the "student feel very comfortable about being in the classroom and taking risks…. I give them enough rein yet they can give their own kind of thing to it". David also saw support as empowering student teachers to be active in their own learning. He said that he was good at "keeping them [student teachers] upbeat", and focussed on reflecting about how to improve things next time. This approach was what student teachers in McGee's (1996) study felt was missing in the practicum where they were required to conform and comply, thus reducing opportunities for their professional growth.

Comments from some teachers indicated that acknowledging and respecting each student teacher was important in their role. David mentioned listening to student teachers to "find out what their goals are", and Kelvin said that listening was part of the associate teacher role because it is one of the "many different ways of finding out how another person is ... and we all learn in different ways". This view suggests that of the role of the associate teacher includes listening and responding. Kelvin said that the associate teacher role is to respond to what the student teacher identifies as their faults because "they will let me know, particularly if they are a person that is serious and wants to do a good job, they will let me know what they can't do … you know, I need help with this".

In the final interviews, some of the teacher participants indicated an increased awareness of the importance of the student teacher perspective in describing the role of the associate teacher. It is not possible to say why this occurred. It may have been because of reflection or because of readings, or even the way the prompt question was asked, but there was no overall trend toward changed views. A good example of this awareness was provided by Barry. He said that the role of the associate teacher, as he sees it, is:

> … taking a student teacher, observing them teach and fine tuning the skills that they bring into the classroom, building on the knowledge where they've got weaknesses, and letting them develop their own teaching experience and practice. Each student is different when they come into the classroom, they come in with different experiences, different curriculum knowledge… And then letting them take whatever they see within my teaching and adopting it and using it for their own … my way is only one way of teaching, as an associate teacher it's for you to take it and use it the best way that you want to.

The comments in this section showed that some associate teachers were aware of the individual nature and different needs of student teachers. In their comments in this section teachers put more emphasis on student teacher learning and reflecting from teaching experiences than on practice, which is consistent with educative mentoring (Schwille, 2008). In her final interview Tania's comments illustrated this when she said that the role of the associate teacher is "giving them a realistic view of teaching, but also giving them the freedom to teach and be themselves in the classroom".

In the next section the findings are presented as they relate to the second research question, What informs associate teachers' perceptions of their role? I asked the associate teachers to tell me how they knew how to be an associate teacher.

Informing associate teacher practice

Throughout the study, many comments were made concerning a lack of preparation for the role of the associate teacher, particularly by teachers new to the school such as Irene. She had a final year student in her class at the time and said that she "wasn't sure of the expectation" and Anne wanted clarification of "what was expected covering what our role was … and where our role finished". David described the feeling of being "thrown in the deep end" as an associate teacher and said that he had "fumbled his way through". Some of the more experienced associate teachers such as Clare also voiced concerns. She said she had realised that she "didn't get any training to do this" and that there was a lack of guidance from the initial teacher education provider. She said "I suspect a lot of teachers just fall into the role". Lack of preparation was also cause for concern for Diane, who said that experiences as a student teacher are not enough to base associate teacher practices on because "having it done to them" is not the same as "doing it".

None of the associate teachers had experienced any significant preparation for their role, which was common in the research literature (Mitchell et al., 2007; Valencia et al., 2009). Anne had come from another school where informal meetings among associate teachers had been held, but generally the teachers in this study relied largely on recollections of their own experiences as student teachers, and their prior experiences in the role of associate teacher to inform their practice. Tania said that people "just become" associate teachers and that when you do, "straight away you just draw on your own experiences as a student". Kelvin said that

"life skills" informed his practices as an associate teacher. Some of the teachers indicated indirectly that their work as teachers informed their practices. One example was provided by Barry who said, when talking about feedback for student teachers that associate teachers should not be "throwing everything down that they need to be doing in the next lesson, like you do with your students in the classroom, you just give them one or two things to work on". Another example came from Irene who said that her role is to give student teachers "continuous feedback and help them set goals" which she did because of "her own experiences in the classroom".

These findings are consistent with comments from the school-based mentors in Jones and Straker's (2006) study. They reported that they were guided in their work by "experience" and "intuition" and from Martin (1997) who showed a link between teaching practices and mentor practice.

The information booklets that were sent by the initial teacher education were seen as useful by some teachers such as Diane, a very experienced associate teacher, who said:

> I think ... far more preparation goes into things … we know what they're expected to do, and I think the booklets that come in … if you ... when you read those you realise, you know … it's clear what the expectations are.

On the other hand Irene felt that:

> Teachers are so busy that we don't often have the brain power to sit down and process what the expectations are …. Teachers should be given some guidance on how much help to give them. I have a 3rd year and wasn't quite sure how much to do for her.

Clare, in her fifteenth year as an associate teacher, provided a good summary of the responses to the issue of associate teacher preparation, when she said in her initial interview:

> I base what I do with my students on what's in the booklets, the expectations that College have from you. Sometimes I don't understand them but basically I try to. Other than that basically it's been more what happened with me. What I liked and what I didn't like. I try and do that with students but no, never gone to any workshops or done any, haven't even really done any reading about associate teachers.

Most of the associate teachers also felt that they needed more support and guidance. They wanted clarification of their role, guidelines for writing feedback, and support and mentoring into the role. Nick said that associate teachers need to be made aware of what is expected of them and what is involved in doing the job. Clare was also concerned about preparation for the role and suggested that intending associate teachers should be able to ask questions of those with experience such as "What's it like? Is it hard work? Is it too much on top of a class?" She also said that "if you are only doing it for the money, don't do it 'cause you won't do it well and you need to be prepared to do it well".

There was total agreement among these teachers that the associate teacher has an essential part to play in initial teacher education. Many of their comments suggested that they see that role as giving student teachers a taste of reality and providing them with, as Barry noted, the opportunity to "put theory into practice". This distinction between the "real" world of the school and the "other" world of tertiary study was common among these associate teachers. Barry, a relatively recent graduate, said that:

> I don't see myself as someone there to develop their knowledge, to make their curriculum knowledge better, I think that's something they need to do at the college. My basis is to help them with their planning, see where their lessons are going, let them experience lessons that don't go well and it's not the end of the world if it does go that way, because in teaching that does happen. Let them experience lessons that I've taught that don't go well and sit down and reflect on it and let them see me reflecting on lessons that go well and don't.

On the other hand Diane gave the impression that she sees a gap between the realities of the classroom and the perceptions of the initial teacher education provider. She said that student teachers are "still being prepared an awful lot for the classrooms of the past and I think that's why… practicum is the most important part of their training".

Crasborn et al. (2011) identified the need for teachers to reflect on their practice as a pre-requisite for success as mentor teachers. This study required teachers to take the time that is necessary to think about their role, and all of the teachers did engage in reflection on their role during this study, although some were more reflective than others. Overall themes which emerged from the teachers indicated feelings of commitment and passion but also uncertainty, guilt and frustration. They felt that lack of time to concentrate precluded them from doing all that they felt needed to be done as good associate teachers, and they worried about how student teachers impacted on their children's learning and behaviour.

The individual nature of the understandings presented in this study suggests that these associate teachers do not have a shared vision of their role, despite being members of the same school community. This is consistent with Hall et al. (2008) who found that there are individual differences in the way associate teachers see their role. Identities as teachers and as associate teachers develop in response to individual experiences; as student teachers, as learners, as teachers, from the contexts in which they have taught previously, from how they have been mentored and according to their personal dispositions (Jones & Straker, 2006). Despite their differences, these associate teachers were united in their desire to support student teachers to become "good" teachers. Their strategies for achieving this were varied but their intentions were for the good of the student teachers and the teaching profession.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented the views of associate teachers about their role and their experiences. The teachers in this study are largely positive and enjoy working with, and relating to most student teachers. They interpret their role in various ways and are aware that there are differences among them. On reflection, many of them indicated that there had been little or no preparation for the associate teacher role and this was a concern for some. In some cases, heightened awareness over the course of the year of the research led to increased uncertainty about their role.

CHAPTER SIX
FINDINGS - PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

This chapter is a synthesis of the associate teacher responses from interviews based on the research question, What are associate teachers' professional learning experiences? This question was posed in order to investigate the teachers' prior experiences and preferences in general and to consider those in the in the context of professional learning for associate teachers. The interview question asks about teachers' experiences of "professional development", the generic term in common usage by teachers, but the research question relates to professional learning in its broader sense.

In the beginning of this chapter I have not used pseudonyms because confidentiality may be breached through revealing biographical details.

In the first part of this chapter I present and analyse the associate teachers' attitudes to and experiences of "professional development" prior to the implementation of the research project, and in the second part I record what they reported about their experiences of professional learning during the research study. These findings are linked with literature and inform the discussion chapter that follows.

Teacher professional development or teacher learning (Gilmore, 2001) takes many forms and has changed over time. All of the associate teachers in the study had some prior experience of professional development and many of them had been exposed to a considerable amount. Some of the teachers had also provided professional development for others. Two of them had unique insights gained from working with the Ministry of Education funded School Advisory Service, delivering professional development to teachers in schools. Several of the more senior staff had been involved in delivering professional development to fellow staff members to share what they had gained from professional learning opportunities outside the school.

Previous professional learning experiences

All of the teachers were able to share some positive professional learning experiences. When they were asked to identify their most valuable professional learning to date, only one of the

nine teachers initially interviewed had a clear preference. Naomi found going outside the school for professional development most useful and exciting for her because it was highly motivating. All of the others gave a range of answers and described successful learning experiences resulting from both school-based and external professional development initiatives.

Outside the school

All of the teachers gave the impression that they found the idea of new learning stimulating. One teacher described two positive and valuable learning opportunities that she had engaged in. One of those took place thirteen years ago when she had been part of a curriculum implementation project and was taken out of the classroom and employed to deliver a new curriculum document to schools. She said that at the time it was "exciting" because it "opened up a whole other aspect of teaching, working with teachers".

Another teacher also had a positive experience outside of the school which provided "really good learning". She identified her best professional learning experience as the year she spent working for the local initial teacher education provider, visiting student teachers in schools and teaching in their undergraduate programme. Prior to the merger of initial teacher education providers with universities, it was common practice in New Zealand for classroom teachers to be seconded for fixed terms to teach and share their expertise in initial teacher education programmes. Both teachers relished the opportunity to step outside of their classroom routines and try something new.

Some teachers spoke about the benefits of professional development programmes which which are sustained over time. In this context a teacher referred to her participation in a project related to her role in middle management, an area which was new to her:

> It went for three days and then we had to go away and we had to do certain tasks and we had to look at our practice in school, and we had to do … a mini research thing – and it was all quite stressful but it was really exciting too … and we went back for another two days so effectively it was a five day block and in between what we had to do was write up our work and share it with, with other people. I think it was just so different to anything I'd done before.

Another teacher described a week long residential music course that he attended in another city. He found this full immersion to be very valuable and explained that he:

> wrote down some of my ideas about what I could be doing as a teacher and my relationship with Music, it was a really good course, and I came back from that not afraid to sing in front of others, and to experiment with Music with kids.

That teacher's experience and those mentioned previously are much less common now in New Zealand, as professional development for teachers has been affected by recent political changes in funding priorities (Ministry of Education, 2012). In his final interview, one teacher remarked on this and observed that in his opinion, "there don't seem to be the courses out there or the professional development opportunities run through the college … anymore". He added that he felt that within his school there had been:

> more of a whole staff focus on professional development … over the last few years since I've been here, so we've looked at the ICT cluster, was the main one and we've looked at, sort of in house things.

These findings are supported by the view of Edwards (2012) who said that in New Zealand:

> Increasingly school change processes are being facilitated through the formation and operation of groups of teachers working together for improved student outcomes. These groupings are variously referred to as networks, networked learning communities, communities of practice, professional learning communities, learning circles or clusters. The formation and support of these types of groups to build capacity has been a major feature in the professional support landscape for New Zealand schools for a number of years. (p. 25)

On-site

School-based professional learning takes many forms and can involve a whole staff, groups of teachers working at the same year level (syndicate), or a cluster of teachers from geographically close schools who have responsibility for an area in a school, such as ICT. It can be facilitated by an outside expert or from within the staff using existing expertise.

The New Zealand National Numeracy Project is a nation-wide project described by Linterman and Browne (2007) as "site-based" and "facilitator-supported". This model of teacher learning is facilitated by "teacher reflection, in-class observations and discussion with peers within a supportive learning community" (p. 38). The associate teachers in this study indicated that

they valued the professional development provided by the Numeracy Project very highly, and that it was extremely beneficial for them. One teacher said this was useful for her because:

> someone would come into the classroom and would demonstrate a session… then they would talk to us about what we wanted to model next and then we would model one for them … and then they would observe and then they would come in and do another observation, so I found those really good because it was more hands on and applicable to exactly what I was doing in the classroom.

She appreciated the individual professional input that this approach provided and the way it was structured. The personal nature of this initiative was seen as valuable for other reasons as well. Another said that the Numeracy Project was his most valuable professional development experience, not only because the structure was good, but also because "the person that took it was very good, had a great attitude … very kind". This was important to him because he was aware that he had "gaps" in his knowledge. Kennedy (2005) suggests that this mentoring/coaching model is characterised by an emphasis on confidentiality rather than accountability. This was valuable for the teacher whose comments indicated that he needed to trust the facilitator. His experience fits with evidence that effective professional development is based on an ethic of care and works best in a supportive environment (Flint et al., 2011; Timperley et al., 2007).

One teacher identified two professional learning experiences which had been successful for him. One was the Numeracy Project and the other was a Physical Education initiative which involved curriculum planning as well as physical activity and was sustained over time. He felt this was valuable because "It was about changing the way we teach P.E. … more the inquiry" and he enjoyed the opportunity to discuss pedagogy and reflect on his practice. Another teacher was involved in the same project in another school and said that the facilitator:

> would come as a model for us and she would talk to us first just about what we were doing in our programmes and then she'd come and model something for us and actually I think being able to see somebody showing you what they are expecting in a way … I think that's the most valuable for me.

These comments indicate that the teachers value professional learning which is personalised, individualised, and closely related to their classroom practice. The *Numeracy Project* and the *Ministry of Education Physical Activity Initiative* were both strongly endorsed as good models for the delivery of professional development by some of the associate teachers.

In this study most teachers preferred professional learning which was individualised for their needs and sustained over time, however, there is no ideal form of professional development. Each model has value but needs to be considered alongside the purpose of the learning and the potential for outcomes (Kennedy, 2005).

Relevance

Good professional learning, as described by these teachers and in the literature, is relevant and timely (Harnett, 2007; Hill, Hawk & Taylor, 2001; Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006). One teacher had discovered this after returning to the classroom from a period of time working in the school advisory service. She had considerable experience in providing professional development programmes for teachers, but had developed some insights since she had re-entered the classroom. She was now very aware that professional learning:

> has to be relevant to the teacher at the time … I know with the Phys. Ed. stuff that we did sometimes … I acknowledge that now, now that I'm back in a school, that sometimes I was pushing too much on them for the busyness of the school … but trying to meet their needs at the time … they are going to switch off because it's not relevant…

Another teacher also wanted professional learning to be relevant. He said that he had been involved in some professional development which was "pitched at the wrong market, you know, too hard or too simple". According to these teachers professional learning programmes should be responsive to the needs of the participants. The individual nature of the numeracy project was cited by many as a good example. A teacher described that as "coaching" but the term used in the project was "facilitating". Kennedy (2005) describes this as a coaching/mentoring model and suggests that it features a relationship which is based on support and challenge.

Presenters

Most of the associate teachers used the term "presenters" rather than facilitators to describe the people who lead professional development. The role of presenter was seen as very important for successful professional development by many of the teachers. One teacher had engaged in a lot of professional development. She attributed much of the success of these opportunities to "good" presenters. She said that she enjoys active participation as part of

professional development and that she likes it when presenters "get discussion going" and "practical activities are good".

Other teachers agreed that their most significant professional development experiences had resulted from good presenters. One teacher celebrated the value of inspirational individual presenters in one-off professional development sessions. She liked the fact that "they really motivated me" and that they "gave you a disk to take away and I took a staff meeting and it reinforced it and then I was able to sort of try and apply it straight away". Another also emphasised the value of "really skilled presenters". She said that teachers can learn a lot from some presenters of professional development and suggested that it is important to be exposed to "people who have got the latest thinking, with new ideas …" She said that she liked presenters who "try it out on you" because "then you remember it".

The quality of the presenter was also important for one teacher but he had reservations about one-off external professional development presentations in general. He said that "some are hit and miss and some are really good. It depends who's delivering it, you're sitting there all day, you know it's how the facilitator delivers it". He said that they can be either "a bit more interactive or sit there for a whole day listening to someone". He suggested that "sometimes you can be too interactive" and that presenters "need to get a balance".

Another teacher had mixed feelings about the "delivery" approach to professional development. Although he mentioned two professional development sessions he had attended run by presenters whom he rated as "superb" and "fantastic", he did make the point that in those sessions he was "not going to take in all the ideas that I had in my head that they had used". This is consistent with a view in the literature that delivery from an expert is not always a good model of professional development (Bourke et al., 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a).

There was no consensus on which type of professional development was most valued by these teachers. One teacher said that one-off out-of-school professional development was "quite good for me". He suggested that teachers "like to go somewhere and spend a day and come back with some good ideas and go, right I'm going to use this in my classroom the next day". On the other hand, another teacher's experience was that these short term external

professional development presentations were not effective. She suggested that they are not sustainable and said:

> Normally you go in for a day and you do whatever it is they are doing and you go back to school and the first couple of days you think that's quite a … I am being honest … I did it when I was delivering as well but … you get totally tied up with the whole … I'm back at school and you might change small things but I don't know that you get time to think and really sort of work through lots of things that you've talked about. You plan to but the reality of the whole job is that you don't.

These comments resonate with other research. Timperley et al.'s (2007) *Best Evidence Synthesis* of teacher professional development suggests that one of the criteria for effective professional development is that it is sustained over time, although they add that this is not sufficient of itself to ensure success.

Professional Learning Experiences during the Research

There were several purposes for the individual professional learning opportunity which I provided as part of the research. The main reason was that I was interested in finding out about the participants' learning priorities, what they saw as their needs, in order to better understand them in their role as associate teachers. Another reason was that I wanted to give something back to them in return for their time. Eight of the original ten teachers were interviewed at the end of the study about the professional development experience, plus one who had been involved all year but was not interviewed initially, and one who had returned to the school at the mid-year point. Those teachers both carried out individual projects during the second half of the year.

Professional Readings

All of the teachers who were in the school for the first part of the year had the opportunity to engage in professional readings and there were clear indications that some of the teachers enjoyed having professional reading provided to them. This confirms the findings from Kwakman's study (2005). She found that professional readings and talking with colleagues were among the professional development activities that teachers were most likely to participate in.

Nick particularly enjoyed this opportunity and said that he:

> hadn't had a lot of professional readings over the past couple of years, so it was quite nice to come back into that. I mean I'm not a great … scholar or studier or whatever but I do like picking up things and, you know, reading … if I'm given readings…

Tania found the readings "really interesting" and Ryan also enjoyed them as they engaged him in a "really reflective process". This sentiment was echoed by David and Clare. David described the experience by saying that the readings caused him to "think about the way that I'm teaching within the classroom and how I'm demonstrating to our student teachers and just being good role models" and added that the readings "gave us direction, and expectations ...".

If professional development is seen as a catalyst for change (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid & Mckinney, 2007), then readings may not have been an effective professional development tool for many of these teachers. The readings gave teachers the opportunity for personal reflection but many of them said that they affirmed their existing ideas. Research suggests that teachers more readily accept ideas which support their existing ideas than those which do not (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Tillema, 2000). In this study Tania commented that for her the readings confirmed "what an associate teacher is or the expectations of one", and also that "student teachers and associate teachers … sometimes have different views and that there's actually a lot of grey area". Kelvin and Diane also said that the readings reinforced "a lot of things that I already thought". The teachers brought their own perspectives and expectations to the readings and in this case it was questionable whether readings alone were useful as a professional development tool.

Moodle based discussions

Moodle was chosen as a tool for facilitating thinking about readings and discussing them with others. This was new to most of the teachers. Accordingly there was a considerable amount of teaching, learning, and follow-up support required in order that teachers were able to access and use this tool. For some this was a 'bridge too far' and acted as a barrier to the genuine engagement and sharing ideas.

Tania enjoyed the process of learning to use Moodle. She said that she "got a lot out of it". She also said that in the group of teachers that she has responsibility for, they allocated time

in meetings for discussion of readings and then posted individually and their postings were just a "little snippet of what we were actually talking about". On the other hand Ryan avoided using Moodle and confessed to using problems with his computer as an reason for lack of participation. He commented on the challenges of finding time in a busy school to "put his thoughts down". He also said that Moodle "just sort of weighed on your mind amongst everything else you had to do". Kelvin said that he saw Moodle as a barrier, describing it as "a wall to climb over". Moodle was seen as "another job to do" by Diane who described how she would make her posting and think "I can tick that box, that's done now" and that as a result she did not spend much time reading other people's comments and responding to them.

On-line Moodle discussions caused some teachers to feel pressure, guilt and stress. Kelvin said that he was nervous about the discussions. This was echoed by David who was concerned about:

> what are other people going to think, so I sort of sit on the fence in a way, because I didn't want to, you know, it would have been good if we did get a dialogue going, but I think …well it's my opinion … that everyone sat on the fence and didn't really want to rock the boat with anyone.

Concern about the public nature of postings was also evident in Barry's comments. Despite the fact that he had considerable prior experience with Moodle, he was "wary" about spelling and commented that "no one wants to get caught out". This is a significant comment in light of the evidence in the literature that learning in communities requires a degree of trust in order to be effective (Poskitt, 2005).

Several teachers suggested that it would have been good to have had formal time allocated for Moodle postings. David said that the process of posting on Moodle was "time consuming, reading it and then having to sit down and think about what you're going to write and then writing it and then double check". Some of the teachers said that they would have preferred to have timetabled face to face conversations about the readings rather than on-line discussion. On reflection Clare decided that Moodle is not the ideal way for her to work although she did post comments as required. She described herself as "an old dog" that "can't be taught new things very well". While there may be some truth in Tania's observation that "teachers are pretty hard to shift, to give something new a go", there were logistical and administrative reasons why some teachers found using Moodle a challenge.

Despite some challenges, using Moodle was not a problem for everyone. Diane said that she had no problem with using it, Barry was also comfortable with the technology and Nick could see some of the benefits of Moodle. He said that "at least with Moodle you can jump on it at home when you've got a couple of spare minutes" as opposed to the challenge of "trying to pull everyone together in a big school" for a meeting.

Although all of the teachers enjoyed the readings and some of them were not fazed by the technology, most teachers found that Moodle was not conducive to the free exchange of ideas. It did not facilitate genuine discussion about the readings and their role as associate teachers, in fact it may have acted as a constraint to that discussion for many of them.

Informal learning

On the other hand, almost all of the teachers mentioned the positive impact of the informal "at the photocopier" conversations that occurred as a result of the school-wide professional development project. Kennedy (2005) suggests that "informal professional discussion" (p. 236) is a valid form of professional development and this was clearly evident in comments that the teachers made. Diane described the situation where teachers were:

> just passing comments about … that thing that Helen asked us to read, what do you think, kind of stuff …. The vast majority of reflection, evaluation, an awful lot of PD goes on in those little situations, because you just have those moments that you spend five minutes just chatting to somebody about something … and that was another thing for us to talk about.

Naomi said that for her, the conversations were the best part of the project although she was aware that this may not be true for all of the teachers involved. She really enjoyed:

> hearing other teachers discuss it … in the staffroom, the fact that it promoted discussion was actually even better than stopping and reading what people wrote. I found … you know how people have got different styles of learning, I enjoyed the actual verbals, hearing what other people were writing and what they were commenting about, more just intimately rather than actually reading about it.

Timperley et al. (2007) agree that these natural and unplanned interactions are valid professional learning opportunities. In this study those incidents were the result of the heightened focus on the role of the associate teacher through the professional readings that were provided.

This research project was intended to explore how the teacher participants experienced professional learning and was not designed to have measurable performance outcomes. During the process, however, teachers described the impact it had on them and their school. This was different for each of them. Kelvin said his experience was that he had "had his brain made bigger". Clare said that the project had an impact for her as an associate teacher:

> because I tend to think about it instead of just do it … and while I can't necessarily say … it's made a major change here, I think that thinking about it and talking about it with colleagues who are doing it as well, it has to impact on your practice … you know, you're looking at things more closely when you're doing that, rather than just that automatic thing, which I think, you can slip into quite, quite quickly when you do it year after year.

This study confirms the premise that teacher learning is a function of the nature of the individual teacher and the personal expectations and prior experiences that they bring to the setting (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In general these teachers said that they were positive about the opportunity for professional development. Diane indicated that she was very positive about professional development and this project in particular, when she said:

> We have something that we actually have to think about, so it stimulates you and I find that relaxing. Yes, I have to use my brain cells and I have to really think and actually sit down and write things as … or if I've printed it out, highlight the things I'm doing, but it's stimulating my brain and it's making me think about something that's not just, how am I going to teach this strategy in numeracy.

Nick also approved of the structure of the project saying:

> It was good to have a focus on your students [student teachers]` rather than sort of just coming in and you do what you do, so it was certainly reflective in the fact, and backed up with the readings and things we were doing and the discussion … I thought the process was really good … once again the time thing but then again you make time to do those and it wasn't onerous.

He concluded:

> I think everyone got something out of the readings and certainly out of the discussion whether it was on Moodle or it was just discussing when you're wandering around the playground on duty or sitting in the staffroom. It certainly generated some discussion around our role as associate teachers.

Individual projects

The self-directed part of the research study took place in the second half of the year. This phase of the research was designed to give the associate teachers the opportunity to address and develop an area of personal interest or concern. Their project choices gave insight into what they saw as their learning priorities and how they had interpreted and connected with the ideas about the associate teacher role from the first half of the year. This research is not intended to measure or evaluate the outcomes of their projects but rather to investigate their experiences of the process. As an aid to understanding I have recorded the initial focus of each teacher and an indication of their thoughts afterwards.

Some professional learning projects were directly related to the role of the associate teacher. Five teachers chose to work on aspects of feedback for student teachers and approached this activity in various ways. Two teachers joined together to prepare a tool for recording feedback for use across the school. It was a paper-based booklet which was eventually issued to all associate teachers and was trialled the following year. One teacher began to reflect on his practices in providing feedback but did not continue that work. Two other teachers reflected on which aspects of teaching they based their feedback on, and used the New Zealand Teachers' Council Graduating Teacher Standards (2007) as a tool to ensure that they were looking at all relevant aspects of student teacher practice. One teacher wanted to investigate how she was perceived by student teachers. She was worried that she was too friendly and not professional enough. She designed a questionnaire for her student teacher to help her to see how she was perceived and what she needed to change.

The rest of the teachers worked on aspects of their professional practice as teachers. Those teachers developed personal projects to improve assessment practices, trial new resources and revisit pedagogical content knowledge, in order to improve their teaching practices. Each teacher worked in an individual way and gave different degrees of priority to that work. They all expressed the belief that they needed to be current with current practice and resources in order to be effective in the associate teacher role.

Initial Focus	End of year reflection from interviews
Fine-tuning feedback for student teachers	Informally mentored another staff member to develop classroom programme Less directive with feedback
Focussing feedback to make it more accessible for student teachers	Joint development of feedback book for school-wide use
Developing metacognition in children's writing using exemplars	Reflection on teaching and where to improve Used new tool with children
In response to requests create feedback sheets to clarify expectations of associate teachers	Joint development of feedback book school-wide use
"Fine-tuning" an area of curriculum teaching	Used a new resource. Improved teaching
Explore on-line resources for writing previously unused	Greater understanding of expectations of quality for children and better results
"Honing focus" on written feedback for student teachers	Gave more areas for focussing feedback
Investigate best practice jointly with student teacher	"Need to be more organised"
Investigate student teacher perceptions of professional persona	Affirmation of personal style.
More consistent and detailed feedback for student teachers	More direction about focussing feedback

Figure 5.   **Summary of individual learning projects**

One teacher made a sustained and engaged commitment and was open about the process he engaged in and involved his student teacher in the project. I have summarised that project here because it was one of the most significant in terms of insights into the difference between the associate teacher reality and the initial teacher education provider expectations.

Case study example

One associate teacher took the opportunity that the research project provided to work on his reading programme. The reason he gave was that he recognised that his guided reading lessons and those of his student teacher were quite different. His action plan evolved through a series of professional conversations about literacy learning during which I supplied excerpts from the New Zealand Ministry of Education *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5-8* (2006). Next, he and his student teacher each taught a guided reading lesson to a group of children. Those lessons were video recorded and then viewed by the associate teacher, the student teacher, and me, the researcher, and compared to the guidelines for best practice. Both the associate teacher and the student teacher then planned and taught another lesson each, which were also recorded, viewed, and discussed. The teacher was willing and able to articulate where he saw his points of difference from the best practice model. All parties benefitted from the experience and the associate teacher said that that the "difference between a person just coming out of college and one who has left college some time ago was quite startling for me".

This is one example of the kind of professional learning that can occur as a result of working with student teachers. Research indicates that if an associate teacher is willing, hosting a student teacher can be the catalyst for reflection and learning (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Russell & Russell, 2011). This teacher may not have reflected on his reading programme if he had not had the opportunity to compare his practices with those of his student teacher and the research project gave him a way of taking action with support.

Self-direction

All of the projects were directed by the individual teachers and included a range of activities such as individual meetings, professional conversations, familiarisation with resources and the use of video as a tool for reflection and discussion. In her initial interview, Anne said that she saw the ideal professional development as a mixture of "giving stuff" such as ICT skills and "looking into practice" which in many ways describes how the project was structured. In response to needs identified by the teachers, I gave them resources and engaged in professional conversations about their practice. The flexible nature of this part of the research project required the teachers to be active in guiding their own development. This was a challenge for some and was welcomed by others.

Ryan enjoyed the individual professional development more than the more formal readings based component of the project. He said that was because "I may have had a little bit more control over the outcome I suppose". Nick also valued the opportunity and said that it was:

> quite good looking at what you were reflecting on your own sort of practice and what you're doing, … so it's good to have some freedom I suppose to choose your own path and which, what you wanted to develop.

This opportunity was also positive for Clare who said that she:

> actually rather liked it, it was sort of like a project to do. And it was something that for me, it took me a while because when you first said you know, we've got to come up with something, I thought, really…. But it was actually good because it made me think about what I was doing and think about, go back and think about the things that we had read and some of the things that had been said about associates and things like that.

Some of the other teachers were less positive about their experiences. Problems arose when a school-wide initiative for giving feedback to student teachers was developed by two of the teacher participants which conflicted with work some other individual teachers were doing on feedback. Despite that, Dean commented that he had benefited from looking into "trying to give more consistent feedback … and more detailed feedback". He said that looking at the Graduating Teacher Standards and a model of the dimensions of teaching had been "quite helpful" and that he was now better equipped to know what to focus on with his student teachers. Nick also felt that he had been able to make some progress on "honing my focus in on the written feedback side". Barry's original focus on feedback was overtaken by the school-wide initiative but instead he became engaged in mentoring another teacher in the project to develop an aspect of their classroom programme, which he enjoyed.

The lack of structure of the self-directed projects was a problem for some teachers. Tania said that she is "more of a structured person" and that she preferred the first part of the year. Kelvin also found the freedom a challenge and commented that overall he preferred the numeracy project approach to professional development because it "was very specific" and "people knew, you've got to meet this deadline, this is where you've got to be." Interestingly David said that the project "gave us direction and expectations".

To conclude, the process of targeting and following through on a personal professional learning project met with mixed reactions. Some teachers described the challenges of finding time to do this, but for others this was a valuable and safe opportunity to develop aspects of their practice which they had not been able to address before. This variety of reactions from teachers should not be a surprise. Piggot-Irvine (2006) suggests that professional learning is subject to variables such as the "developmental stage of the learner" and "their learning style" (p. 478). Prior experiences, expectations and personality impact on the professional learning of individual teachers (Kwakman, 2003).

Summary

Teachers engage in professional learning if they believe that "it will expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth and enhance their effectiveness" (Guskey, 2010, p. 382). Overall, these teachers were positive about learning and were able to set personal professional learning priorities. Ryan said that the project as a whole had "reinvigorated people's teaching". This was not the experience of all of the participants, but overall the teachers were positive about the experience and felt that they had gained something from it.

These teachers wanted professional opportunities which were timely and relevant, suggesting that an awareness of the individuality of the learners is important. Harnett (2007) wrote about professional learning for teachers in New Zealand, and said that "if the intentions of professional development are to bring about change in teachers' thinking and practice, more emphasis should be placed on active methods that are relevant and meaningful to the teachers concerned" (p. 208). For professional learning to be genuine and meaningful teachers must see a need for it. In this study there were indications that, despite saying that they enjoyed professional learning, the teachers might not have been ready or willing to assimilate new ideas about the role of the associate teacher (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Macdonald, 2009).

In his initial interview and in the final one, Barry spoke fluently and with confidence about how he saw the associate teacher role. He said that he was confident and knew what to do because he was a relatively recent graduate who was "still current with the programme at College" and could remember what it was like and put himself in the student's shoes. This resonates with findings from Hall et al. (2008) who reported that how a teacher is mentored informs how they enact their role as mentors. In her final interview Naomi, a very

experienced associate teacher, said that for her, the readings about the associate teacher role had confirmed what she thought. After the professional learning project Kelvin also said that his ideas about the role had been affirmed, and Nick echoed these sentiments when he said that he had not learned anything new about the role of the associate teacher because he already had a "pretty good understanding" which had been developed from prior experience. These comments suggest that for some of these teachers professional learning about the associate teacher role may have been neither timely nor relevant. The professional learning projects provide a glimpse into how these teachers saw themselves in the associate teacher role and what aspects of that role were important to them.

The findings in this chapter have shown that based on their prior experiences these teachers prefer learning opportunities when they are relevant, individualised and sustained. Many of them enjoyed professional readings and talking about them with colleagues in person. Some of the teachers said that they had engaged in reflection as a result of the readings and conversations. It is not possible however to draw conclusions about the effectiveness or otherwise of the programme. That was not the intention of this research. The teachers have given some insight into their preferences and experiences but it seems that the nature of the individual teacher is a significant factor in both their approach to professional learning about the associate teacher role and their learning priorities.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate how a group of associate teachers experience their role and professional learning in order to better understand them and the practicum, with a view to improvement for all parties. In previous chapters I reviewed the research literature, situated and explained the study, and presented the findings. In this chapter I address each research question and then discuss the themes I have identified with reference to research. In the first part of the chapter the factors which influence these associate teachers are described and arecompared with the expectations of associate teachers as outlined in the research literature, closing with some suggestions for the future direction of practicum.

Associate teacher role

When associate teachers describe their role they provide a glimpse into their personal understandings of the purpose of practicum (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). The perception that practicum is an opportunity for student teachers to learn about how to teach by taking guidance from associate teachers and engaging in what Valencia et al. (2009) describe as "mimetic" work was a strongly held view by many of the associate teachers in this study. The emphasis was on the practice of teaching with the underlying message that teachers know what "works" and students need to follow their lead.

Individual teachers made comments about the roles as associate teachers that varied from collaboration, where teachers share their thinking with student teachers as reflective colleagues, (Kane & Broadley, 2005), to a more traditional view of teaching as a learned craft (Grudnoff & Tuck, 2003). The majority of comments, both before and after the professional development project, indicated a belief that the associate teacher role is to teach student teachers the rules of the real world of being a teacher, in contrast to the theoretical world of the initial teacher education provider.

Most of these teachers spoke confidently about their understanding of their role, even though they said that they had not been given any support in preparation for it. Their individual

comments were wide ranging and sometimes inconsistent, for example, in an initial interview, one teacher talked about the need for associate teachers to be open to sharing their classrooms and to let the students teachers have freedom by letting them go, but in the final interview the same teacher said that "you often have to knock them down to pick them up and dust them off." Even the least directive of the teachers said in his final interview that the associate teacher role included that of judge who has to be able to say "might feel good, might look good but it ain't good".

There are suggestions in the literature that the associate teacher role should be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of student teachers (Crasborn et al., 2010; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). The associate teachers in this study understood that each student teacher is different and that expectations of student teachers should develop over the course of their teacher education programmes. In his final interview, Barry emphasised that he adapts his programme by giving student teachers more teaching and more responsibility over time, however his perceptions of himself as the director of the student teacher remained intact throughout. Most of the associate teachers described the associate teacher role as if it was a fixed entity with a set of conventions, suggesting that they do not recognise the importance of versatility and flexibility as associate teacher attributes.

Relationships

The traditional triadic practicum setting usually features one student teacher with one associate teacher for a sustained period of time which is intense and intimate. The emotional dimension of the associate teacher role and the importance of positive interpersonal connections between the participants are well described in the literature (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Hargreaves, 1998; Hastings, 2004; Zeichner, 2002). Building positive relationships with student teachers was important to all of the associate teachers in this study but they were resigned to the fact that relationships were not always comfortable and easy. In her final interview Clare said that "every student's different, some of them you get really close to and others it's quite different". Although most of the associate teachers found it much easier to work with a compatible person, positive personal relationships were perceived as a bonus occurring by chance. In this study it appeared that these associate teachers believed that the success or otherwise of associate teacher–student teacher relationships is predetermined by like-mindedness or personal compatibility rather than by

their deliberate actions as a mentor and professional colleague. The degree to which they shared common perspectives was seen as an important factor for successful practice and many of these teachers believed that matching student teachers with associate teachers is valuable. Zeichner (2002) acknowledges that student teachers need to have support from associate teachers, but suggests that compatibility is not a sufficient criterion for selecting student teacher placements, claiming that it is more important that associate teachers are open-minded and that they model genuine reflective practice. Compatibility is not the same as intersubjectivity and there was little evidence of awareness of the student teachers' perspectives among the teachers in the study. The shared meaning and sense of purpose that defines a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) was generally lacking.

Establishing positive personal relationships is important in the triadic practicum model, however, the purpose of practicum is student teacher learning. To this end it is more important for student teachers and associate teachers to have a professional relationship than a personal one, but this was difficult for some of these associate teachers. The challenge of having "difficult conversations" was highlighted as one example of the conflict between personal and professional relationships, and is evidence of the concerns these teachers had about their ability to co-construct shared meaning from experiences with their student teachers. Anne provided an example of a student teacher who she "got on really well with" who was not meeting expectations and said that their close relationship made it difficult to deal with that.

In her New Zealand study, Ferrier-Kerr (2009) suggested that professional relationships should be developed carefully and that they require "reciprocal commitment to each other's development and professional learning" (p. 790). Trust, sharing, support, and working together on equal terms are important aspects of the mentoring relationship (Awaya et al., 2003), but few of the teachers in this study saw their relationship with student teachers in those terms. Many of them indicated that they interpret the associate teacher role as a form of benign authoritarianism. In her initial interview, Clare talked about letting student teachers "sink or swim and then bailing them out" in order to teach them a lesson. Her view was typical of the majority in this study which gave the impression that the associate teacher is in charge of student teacher learning, acting as a gatekeeper to the teaching profession (Devos, 2010; McDonald, 2009).

The relationship between student teachers and the children in the class is an important aspect of the practicum. Many of these associate teachers were aware of the importance of student

teachers being able to "manage" children, and in their interviews the teachers spoke of their frustrations when children were non-compliant with student teachers. They also celebrated the importance of student teacher relationships with children. This was also found in Mitchell et al.'s (2007) comparative study of Australian and Canadian associate teachers, which emphasised the satisfaction they felt when those relationships were positive. Nick was typical of many of the teachers when he mentioned that seeing student teachers make connections with children was one of the most satisfying things about the associate teacher role, but overall there was an expectation that it was the student teacher's responsibility to make this happen. None of the teachers suggested that their role included helping student teachers to develop appropriate relationships with children, although they were aware of how important such relationships are for effective and successful teaching. These associate teachers did not mention mediating student teacher/child relationships as part of their role, implying that student teachers' ability to form relationships with children is either their own responsibility or should be developed elsewhere.

Modelling

All of the associate teachers said that they were committed to building positive relationships, modelling teaching and providing feedback based on observations, although there were differences in the way each of these was interpreted and the degree of emphasis that was placed on each. Some of them had a vision of the associate teacher as technical adviser who has expertise across the curriculum in order to be a good model for student teachers. This view is common among associate teachers in New Zealand (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Haigh, 2001) and elsewhere (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Edwards & Protheroe, 2003). Much of the research literature suggests that a key aspect of the associate role, especially for student teachers, is to model teaching expertise (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Glen, 2006; McDonald, 2009; Villiers & Mackisack, 2011). In this study some of the teachers were definite that their role as associate teachers requires them to model "best practice" but others were less sure and lacked confidence in their ability to do so. One teacher said in his initial interview that associate teachers should show student teachers a real class which is not going to be perfect and said that he was open and honest about his degree of professional knowledge.

In New Zealand most primary teachers are generalists, so maintaining currency in pedagogical content knowledge across all learning areas is a challenge. It is perhaps not

surprising that some of these teachers were worried about their teaching, particularly if they believed that the associate teacher role requires them to be expert models for their student teachers. Malm (2009) suggests that "fundamental competence anxiety" (p. 85) is part of being a teacher. During the research it became apparent that for some teachers it was difficult to admit to being less than exemplary. Cameron and Mitchell (2002) celebrate the importance of a school environment where teachers have the opportunity to talk about pedagogy and assessment and to share their practices with each other. In order for this to happen teachers must feel safe to take risks and make mistakes, and there were suggestions that for some of them the emotional geographies of the context had an impact on their ability to address their personal learning needs (Hargreaves, 2001).

Teaching involves pedagogical knowledge, subject knowledge skill, and dispositions (McDonald, 2009; McGee et al., 2010). Timperley (2013) describes the complexity of effective teaching and states that "present-day New Zealand teachers can only implement the New Zealand curriculum if they have deep curriculum knowledge" (p. 12). McGee et al. (2010) also raised concerns about whether it is possible for generalist primary teachers to have sufficient content knowledge to facilitate learning effectively in the eight learning areas of the New Zealand Curriculum (2007). Unfortunately, opportunities for teacher professional development across the curriculum are less available than they once were. In recent years funding, provision, and priorities for teacher professional learning and development in New Zealand have changed considerably. There has been no learning area based professional learning and development in New Zealand since 2010, except for science. The Ministry of Education has prioritised professional learning in literacy and numeracy for teachers in schools with learners who are Māori, Pasifika, and those who are achieving at least two levels below the national standard for their age. Local providers, previously known as the School Support Service, based at Colleges of Education prior to mergers, and at Universities after that, have been replaced by large Ministry funded consortia and a proliferation of private providers. Primary schools that do not fit within Ministry of Education targets must access and pay for professional learning and development for their staff, and priorities are therefore identified independently, ultimately at the discretion of the school leader.

Some of the associate teachers in this study said that they wanted to stay current in their practice, for example, Barry said that he "would love to have some more PD with literacy and numeracy just to keep the skills … because new techniques and new resources are coming out

all the time". There is an initial teacher education provider expectation that associate teachers will model best practice as it has been taught to student teachers by staff at the provider institution. In New Zealand it is difficult for classroom teachers to access support for professional learning in areas of their personal choice, particularly related to subject knowledge, once they have completed their initial teacher education. At the same time there are challenges to initial teacher education programmes in terms of "time spent in schools, curriculum content, curriculum-related pedagogy, education and professional studies, and teaching approaches and skills" (McGee et al., 2010, p. 22). Accordingly student teachers may need more, not less, support from their associate teachers (Smith & Tinning, 2011).

One of the problems of the paired associate teacher/student teacher model is that most teachers have curriculum areas where they are more competent and confident than others (Valencia et al., 2009). Within a school there may be other teachers who have curriculum expertise and currency in particular areas and are better able to support student teachers learning than the designated associate teacher. Celebrating the different strengths of teachers, and having them share their expertise with student teachers who are in the school might go some way toward reducing the expectation that individual associate teachers have in-depth subject knowledge in all areas of the curriculum. Zeichner (2002) suggests that we need to think more about the school as the placement site and less about the individual classroom.

Mentoring

The role of associate teacher as educative mentor does require teachers to have the confidence and ability to open their practices to scrutiny and engage in professional collegial conversations with student teachers. Potentially this makes teachers who work with student teachers very vulnerable (Bullough, 2005; Bullough & Draper, 2004). Teachers in an Australian study reported that they were reluctant to work with student teachers because of what they perceived as their own lack of ability, lack of preparedness, and lack of confidence (Walkington, 2005). One way of coping with a lack of knowledge is to adopt a dominant way of working (Carlsen, 1991; Nilsson & van Driel, 2010). Applied to the practicum context, this suggests that a less confident associate teacher may be more directive and less collaborative. Valencia et al. (2009) described what happened when an initial teacher education provider encouraged student teachers to develop a "disposition and desire for inquiry into their practice" (p. 319). When they attempted to practice this in their school placement they were

met with associate teachers who were reluctant to engage in that way. Genuine reflection and inquiry are difficult for student teachers in such an environment, yet that is what is expected of them in many teacher education programmes. This recurring theme sees student teachers trying to serve two masters with different agendas and to find a point of balance between them where they can be comfortable and safe.

Many researchers assert that effective associate teachers should be successful practitioners with a strong pedagogical base (Fayne, 2007; Koerner & O'Connell-Rust, 2002; McDonald, 2004; Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010), but being a model teacher is not sufficient to ensure success as a mentor (Zeichner, 2002). Effective mentoring requires a complex array of dispositions, knowledge, and skill, and is demanding and personally challenging in many ways. This stance has implications for associate teacher professional development, and supports the view that learning to be a mentor requires self-reflection on the part of the associate teacher and engagement with the mentor role on a deep and personal level (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Jones & Straker, 2006; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Reflective practice

In the research literature, engaging in reflection is presented as an essential part of learning to be a teacher (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Clarke, 2006; Ethell & McMeniman, 2000; Korthagen, 2004; Loughran, 2006). Although there is evidence that critical reflection is challenging for student teachers (Murray et al., 2008) reflection is a necessary practice for a student teacher who is preparing for a future as an adaptive expert (Timperley, 2013). Korthagen (2004) reminds us that if we want to encourage student teachers to engage in core reflection, this should be modelled in their teacher education programme. Some of the associate teachers in this study wanted to encourage student teachers to reflect on their practice but only within the confines of their existing programme and their school context. Student teachers in this situation are restricted in their ability to be genuinely reflective and open. This can result in frustration as they are required to either follow the prescribed model of behaviour or risk destabilisation of the practicum, reminding us that one of the fundamental tensions of practicum occurs when expectations of student teachers by initial teacher education providers are at odds with those of the associate teacher.

An associate teacher who is acting as a mentor makes their tacit knowledge explicit and accessible to student teachers, articulating not only what to do but why they do it. The practicum can be used to look beyond individual instances and learn from what is already known, an opportunity to draw on theory. In this study associate teachers did not refer to making links between practice and theory. Some teachers said that part of their role is to share their thinking with student teachers but there were no indications that the associate teacher role should go beyond particular practical issues. Indeed, some teachers clearly stated that the initial teacher education provider is concerned with theory and the associate teacher with practice.

Making theory explicit and linking it with practice in a coherent way is an important part of the associate teacher role and is necessary for transformative student teacher learning and teaching (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Cameron, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010). The findings of this study suggest that some student teachers are being "trained" for the present rather than developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions which will prepare them for an unknown future and equipping them to contribute to "transformation of schools to meet new conditions and emergent priorities" (Vick, 2006, p. 195). In this study the associate teachers generally saw their role as perpetuating the status quo as it was lived in their school setting. Valencia et al. (2009) said that "when student teachers inhabit the constrained role of guest in someone else's classroom, there is little room to develop their own professional identities" (p. 319). This suggests student teacher compliance and conformity rather than the critical thinking, inquiry, and reflective practice which are presented as desirable behaviours in much of the practicum literature (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Jones & Straker, 2007; McDonald, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2007). Yost et al. (2000) suggest that it is necessary for teacher education programmes to focus on critical reflection and challenge student teachers' entrenched beliefs (p. 41), allowing them to challenge the status quo by providing insight into the theory, pedagogy, politics, history, and social issues surrounding teaching.

One key finding from this study about the role of the associate teacher, is that these associate teachers have strong opinions about their role which are firmly held, and which on the whole, are not consistent with a view of the associate teacher as educative mentor who facilitates student teachers learning to become adaptive experts.

Informing associate teacher practices

In the traditional triadic practicum model the associate teacher is usually the person who the greatest influence on student teacher learning (Crasborn et al., 2010; Edwards & Protheroe, 2003. Ironically, associate teachers are often left alone to interpret their role, with minimal input from the initial teacher education provider, and the result can be confusion and stress for all parties.

Personal history

The associate teachers in this study reported having virtually no guidance from the initial teacher education provider in how to carry out their role beyond the information provided in practicum booklets, which detail associate teacher tasks and the requirements for student teachers. This confirms the findings in much of the practicum research literature that there is a lack of preparation for the associate teacher role (Clarke, 2007; McDonald, 2004; Russell & Russell, 2011; Sanders et al., 2005; Valencia et al., 2009). Constructing an identity as an associate teacher is complex and should be supported (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003; Sim, 2011), and when this does not happen teachers have to make sense of their role independently (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005; Hastings, 2004). In this study the teachers reported that their practices as associate teachers were informed by their own expectations of how the role should be enacted based on their life experiences. These findings resonate with a social constructivist view of learning by suggesting that both the individual and the context are important factors in understanding how associate teachers interpret their role (Mitchell et al., 2007).

Experiences as a student teacher are another influence on associate teacher practices (Lind, 2004). Some of the teachers in this research said that they wanted to replicate their positive experiences as student teachers and others wanted to address the wrongs that had been done to them (Beck & Kosnik, 2000). These references to the past, in some cases the distant past, are a concern, as teacher education programmes and expectations of the associate teacher role have changed considerably over time (Hall et al., 2008; Le Cornu, 2010; Loughran, 2006). In the absence of a shared vision there is a lack of commonality communication and coherency (Butler & Cuenca, 2012, p. 303) which makes it difficult for student teachers to meet the different expectations of both the initial teacher education provider and the associate teacher.

While I do not suggest that all associate teachers should be the same, in this case there appears to be a lack of understanding of the associate teacher as mentor and of the role of the student teacher. This leads to difficult practicum experiences and the conclusion that student teachers are lucky to get a good associate teacher.

Sociocultural theory suggests that individuals grow and develop though interaction within the contexts and relationships that influence their lives, and that knowledge is constructed from an individual perspective (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Hall et al., 2008; Keiny, 1994; Valencia et al., 2009). In the absence of genuine engagement and negotiation with the initial teacher education provider, associate teachers have been influenced by the other aspects of their lives and have interpreted the associate teacher role in their own ways. In effect, they are learning from experience rather than from negotiating meaning as members of a partnership.

Classroom practices

The language of the classroom was commonly used by associate teachers to describe their practices in this study, suggesting that they were applying their knowledge of teaching children to their work with student teachers. This is a consistent theme among teachers who work in the associate teacher role. Clarke and Jarvis-Selinger (2005) suggest that there is a direct link between associate teachers' perceptions of teaching and how they enact their role. In this study it was most evident in the context of feedback for student teachers. *The New Zealand Curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007) claims that teachers who demonstrate effective pedagogy make links to students' prior learning and experience by stating that:

> Students learn best when they are able to integrate new learning with what they already understand. When teachers deliberately build on what their students know and have experienced, they maximise the use of learning time, anticipate students' learning needs, and avoid duplication of content. (p. 34)

Current classroom practice emphasises the importance of specific focussed feedback for individual learners and shared understanding of next steps for learning. In this study some associate teachers described feedback for student teachers in those terms, suggesting that their role required them to be moving them on to the next step in a progression. On reflection it became apparent to some of the teachers that they did not have the knowledge or the tools to be able to do that. There was no shared understanding of what should be expected of student

teachers at various stages of learning, nor of any progressions in learning to be a teacher. This realisation was a concern for some associate teachers and was the catalyst for four of the individual professional learning projects.

In their 2006 study, Jones and Straker suggested that "the majority of mentors draw on their teacher knowledge without sufficiently taking into account the specific aspects of adult learners and the generic principles underpinning mentoring" (p. 165). The associate teachers in the current study did not see student teachers as adult learners and professional colleagues and had limited exposure to the role of mentor as distinct from the traditional associate teacher role. As educative mentors, the associate teacher role is to encourage and model reflective practice, supporting student teachers to be problem-solvers rather than imitators or clones of their associate teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; McDonald & Flint, 2011).

Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of a community of practice where members have a shared identity, we can see that these teachers do not see themselves as teacher educators but identify more strongly as members of the teaching community. Their comments reflect the ways of thinking and talking about teaching children that are prevalent in teaching in New Zealand. Learning to mentor is a socially constructed practice and associate teacher perspectives are shaped by the social context which they have experienced (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Identity formation takes place in the interaction between individuals and their ecological environment including the accepted ways of "being" an associate teacher in the school context (Reay, 2004).

Working with a student teacher can be an opportunity for professional growth (Russell & Russell, 2011; Walkington, 2005; White et al., 2010). The associate teachers in this study were not as overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of being an associate teacher as those in Simpson et al.'s (2007) study, but they did give examples of the benefits of working with student teachers. Some of the teachers in this research were conscious of the need to facilitate student teacher reflection and acknowledged that they learned new things from them. One associate teacher said that he was using a resource that a student teacher had developed during her time in his class. Overall though, there was limited acknowledgement of the potential for reciprocity as a result of their associate teacher role. These associate teachers' perspectives were not consistent with those who see working with student teachers as a catalyst for self-

reflection (Russell & Russell, 2011). The opposite was the case as some teachers said that their practices had become "automatic … when you do it year after year" (Clare).

The comments that many of these associate teachers made about their work suggest that their practices are informed by habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus represents the habitual taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving that come from accumulated experience, which invites individuals to do as they have always done. In the practicum context, habitus influences how associate teachers operate when they base their practices on familiar and unexamined expectations of the individual and the traditions of the setting.

In the current study there were some common beliefs about the associate teacher role but there was also diversity resulting from individual teachers' prior experiences. Lind (2004) confirmed this and found a lack of consistency among individual associate teachers' interpretations of their role. The result is the potential for a range of experiences for student teachers. The opportunity to learn in a range of contexts is useful, however variation in the way the role of the associate teacher is understood and enacted is problematic, particularly if student teachers make assumptions based on their prior experiences. Negotiating the parameters of their placement is a necessary part of the practicum experience for many student teachers.

Another key finding from this study is that these associate teachers relied on their personal prior experiences and their knowledge of teaching children to inform their work with student teachers, rather than their understanding of facilitating adult learning.

Professional learning

Throughout the study, the associate teachers signalled that they needed more information from the initial teacher education provider. They wanted closer alignment between practicum teaching requirements and school programmes, and many of them felt that they did not get sufficient information from the initial teacher education provider about student teachers' prior experiences and stages of development. In effect, they were signalling a need to work more closely together as members of the practicum community. The initial teacher education provider in this study provides handbooks of practicum requirements and expectations of associate teachers. The only other reference point for these associate teachers is the New

Zealand Teachers' Council *Graduating Teacher Standards* (2007). These give aspirational and broad guidelines for what competencies student teachers are expected to have by the time they have completed their programme of teacher education (McGee et al., 2010). While they give some direction, they do not provide the information that these associate teachers were asking for.

The teachers in this study appreciated the opportunity that the research project provided an opportunity to ask questions and raise issues in an informal way. My sustained presence in the school allowed for communication, clarification and collaboration, which are important for successful mentoring and are the basis of exemplary teacher education programmes (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hoban, 2006). Grudnoff (2011) claims that practicum should be seen as a "site for collaborative endeavour" (p. 231) where shared understandings are developed. The associate teachers in this study were positive about their experience of beginning to engage in that way.

This study raised associate teacher awareness of the importance of their role through readings, Moodle discussions, conversations with me, and, more significantly, through talking with each other informally. All of these activities resulted in what Clare described as opening up "the topic of being an associate teacher instead of just being an associate teacher", allowing an opportunity to reflect on their beliefs, which is an essential part of learning. The degree to which they did reflect and whether their reflections impacted on the practices are not the focus of this research, but comments in their final interviews indicate that generally their habitual practices had not been challenged.

The key to effective professional learning is engagement with the learner. Lind (2004) argues that professional development is necessary for associate teachers in New Zealand and emphasises that it must acknowledge and reference the nature of the individual teacher in order to be effective. Lind's view was supported by the associate teachers in this study, who showed that many of their professional development experiences were specific to them as individuals, and that they gained different things from the same learning opportunities.

Community

Effective professional development is best achieved collaboratively (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In this study the teachers valued the professional conversations that arose from a shared focus on the role of the associate teacher, consistent with the view that associate teachers want to have closer contact with initial teacher education providers (Colvin et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007). In effect they are calling for a greater sense of belonging so that they may become full members of the practicum community. Using the lens provided by Lave and Wenger (1991), associate teachers could be seen to be signalling a desire to move from peripheral participation to becoming insiders in the teacher education community. From that perspective the associate teachers are novices requiring socialisation into the teacher education community. Conversely, they might be indicating that initial teacher education providers need to become insiders in the school based learning sector and more familiar with the realities of the classroom.

Much of the research literature presents associate teachers who do not meet initial teacher education provider expectations as a problem (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Fairbanks et al., 2000; Murray et al., 2008; Sanders, 2005). Some of the teachers in this study held the opposite perspective, suggesting that that initial teacher education provider was the problem. Diane said that "student teachers are being prepared for the classrooms of the past" and suggested that teacher education staff are "out of touch with reality" and have "been away from the classroom too long". Although there is an argument about "whether schools should take a lead from the ITE or whether schools are ahead in curriculum development and implementation" (McGee et al., 2010, p. 20), lack of understanding, and lack of respect, test the credibility of the "triadic" practicum model.

An alternative way of viewing the need for improved supervisory practices by associate teachers is to see them as part of the initial teacher education ecosystem (Valencia et al., 2009). From that perspective, the problems of practicum are the failings of the system as a whole and there is a need to come together to work more closely together for the benefit of all (Clarke, 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Kennedy, 2005; Le Cornu, 2010).

This study showed that these associate teachers had not previously considered the importance of their role in any significant way. Unless teachers are privy to the expectations of the provider institution and are given time and support to develop their ability to meet those

expectations, they will continue to do what they have always done (Jones & Straker, 2006). The findings suggest a need to begin comprehensive, sustained conversations about the purpose of practicum (Le Cornu, 2010; Nielsen et al., 2010). A genuine connection between staff from the provider institution and associate teachers is important in order that all parties can re-examine their roles and reflect on their tacit understandings to examine the idiosyncratic practices (Jones & Straker, 2006, p. 182) that have been a feature of the practicum for a long time. This view goes some way to mitigating the culture of blame for associate teacher inadequacies that features throughout much of the practicum literature, shifting the focus from the individual associate teacher to the relationship between the initial teacher education provider and their associate teachers.

Clarke et al. (2013) conclude from their literature review that "cooperating teachers who have teaching experience, expertise as classroom teachers and a commitment to professional learning make good mentors" (p. 29), but mentoring is much more than that. We ask a lot of the teachers who work with our student teachers in schools. In an ideal world they would be models of exemplary practice, have knowledge and understanding of programme content and conceptual frameworks, and have all of the skills and dispositions of an educative mentor (Cameron, 2009). In this study all wanted to do their job well but they were interpreting their role in their own way in the absence of any significant professional learning and development opportunities.

The traditional triad is built on an expectation that each associate teacher will be teaching in ways that align with the theories and models that student teachers are being exposed to by initial teacher education providers. We know that is not the reality in many cases (Korthagen et al., 2006). The mismatch between the campus–based programme and the practicum is problematic. If teaching on campus does not reflect the ideas that are being presented to student teachers as exemplary practice it seems to be "unreasonable to expect them to teach in non-traditional ways" (Timperley, 2013, p. 30). Conversely, without communication and support, we cannot expect associate teachers to emulate, or even endorse, what is being presented on campus as best practice.

Lack of communication is one of the fundamental problems of practicum and it causes many of the stresses and tensions which characterise the practicum. In order for those who work with student teachers to engage in a cohesive fashion they must be able to communicate

effectively to avoid the misunderstandings and disagreements which are the norm rather than the exception (Allen et al., 2010, p. 618). Effective communication requires openness, respect and generosity, and both teacher knowledge and provider knowledge must be valued to improve student teacher learning experiences (Grudnoff & Williams, 2010). In the research literature there are strong messages which suggest that closer relationships between practicum partners are the key to improvement in initial teacher education in general and in the practicum in particular (Allen et al., 2010; McGee, 2001; McGee et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2010).

Schools that act as professional learning communities are supportive safe places where teachers can admit uncertainty and ask questions (Snow-Gerono, 2005). Lave and Wenger's (1991) community of practice model suggests that working together to share and learn from each other in a trusting and respectful way is valuable for all members of the community (Walkington, 2005). Harnett (2012) agrees that the culture of a school is an important factor for effective professional learning. She said:

> In order to overcome the inherently private and isolated nature of teaching and the tendency toward individualism in school cultures, teachers' professional development should involve creating supportive networks of teachers who can collaborate and learn from each other. (p. 369)

A professional learning community and a community of practice share common features. They both incorporate people, practice, and shared knowledge (Edwards, 2012). Professional learning communities act as communities of practice when they feature situated learning and reflective practice (Clarke, 2007).

A community model resonates in the context of working with student teachers. Loughran et al. (2008) claim that significant relationships between the members of the practicum setting are necessary for successful teacher education programmes. Looking at the practicum triad in isolation without recognising the interconnections of the initial teacher education ecology is merely "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic" (Wideen et al., 1998, p. 167). One alternative to the triad places the student teacher in a school rather than with an individual associate teacher, so that the whole school community is involved in mentoring. A community model of mentoring gives student teachers the opportunity to see teacher diversity as they are not isolated in one classroom with one teacher (Edwards, 2012) and allows the work of the associate teacher to be deprivatised and shared (Fullan, 2007).

Models of practicum which celebrate collaboration and conversation between schools and initial teacher education providers have proliferated since the current research began (Goodnough et al., 2009; Grudnoff & Williams, 2010; Harlow et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2010; White et al., 2012). The prevalence of the term 'learning communities' in the practicum literature belies the complexity of actualising this in practice. Shifting the culture of the practicum is challenging when something has been so deeply entrenched over such a long time. Adopting a community view will not, of itself, solve the problems of practicum but it does provide a useful lens for re-examining the way we configure the student teacher learning experience and the roles of the participants.

The key finding about associate teacher professional learning from this study is that although these teachers were open to professional readings and informal conversations about their role as associate teachers, some of them had other professional learning priorities which were more important at the time.

CHAPTER EIGHT
TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF PRACTIUM

The teaching practicum exists within a broader socio-cultural context and accordingly an alternative model of practicum must acknowledge the systems that make up the initial teacher education ecology (Valencia et al., 2009) and the diversity of experience and perspectives that all of the participants bring to that setting. The work of initial teacher education and the work of a school are not motivated by the same goals and they do not employ the same cultural tools. For student teachers to be able to move freely between the schools and the initial teacher education system there need to be shared understandings and a common base to build from and the creation of a community. In a practicum learning community there would be acknowledgement of the opportunities for reciprocity which exist within that community, while maintaining a focus on student teacher learning as central to that system (see Figure 6).
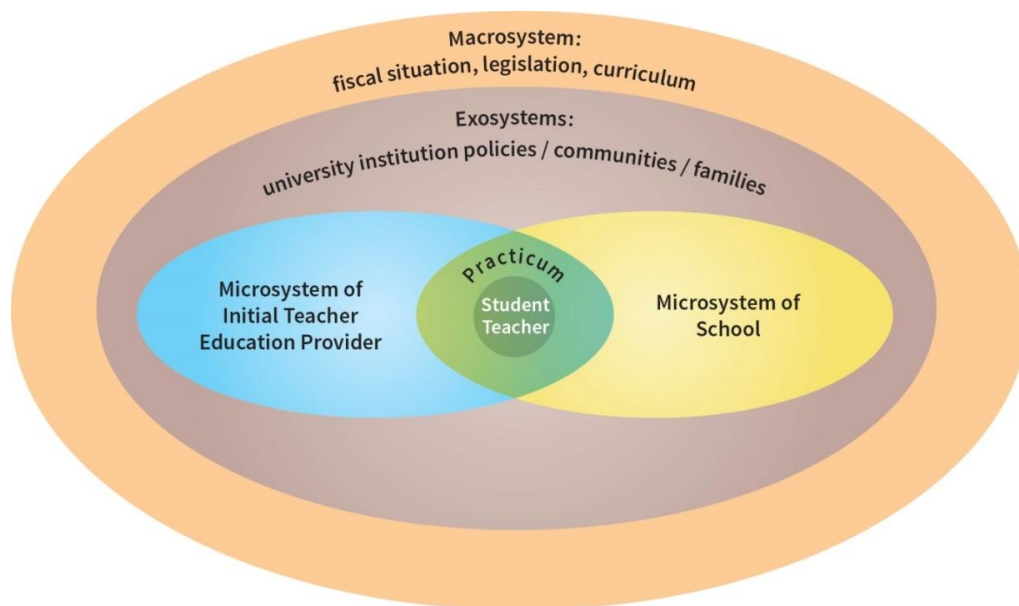
Figure 6.   **Ecological practicum framework**

Figure 6 shows that the student teacher moves between two clusters of microsystems – the initial teacher education provider and the school, while learning to be a teacher. The practicum is a microsystem where the roles, activities and relationships the student teacher experiences, influence their learning to be a teacher. A key relationship within the school microsystem is with the associate teacher, but other relationships, roles, and activities, such as

those involving the principal, other teachers, and the children, impact on learning. The student teacher is also working towards a qualification within the initial teacher education provider microsystem, which places demands on what must achieved in the practicum. The initial teacher education provider microsystem influences come from the course work, relationships with lecturers (particularly visiting lecturers) and peers.

Each member of the practicum community is influenced by their own microsystems. For a teacher education student they may include their part time work, their teacher education programme, their family, and their social network. For a visiting lecturer the microsystem may include their experiences of research, their job description, and their colleagues, while for an associate teacher they may be the children in their class, their colleagues in the school, their parent community, and their school leader.

The school is a microsystem which is associated with the roles, responsibilities, and activities of the teachers who work there. School culture is an important aspect of effective learning environments (Lovett & Cameron, 2011). Schools which are learning communities de-privatise their practices and recognise the individual strengths and needs of the members of their community. Not all schools operate in that way. Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) reported that in the course of their research:

> The researchers were stuck by the differences in the contexts their teacher participants were working in. They argue that the learning environments they observed seemed to be the result of interplay between individual teachers' knowledge/skills/dispositions (which varied greatly) and the context within which they were working (the students, the school context/organisation and so on). (p. 47)

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2010) has signalled that they see strong professional leadership as a significant factor in encouraging teacher professional learning and development. The importance of a positive learning environment for professional conversations is one of the implications of this study.

Figure 6 shows the intersecting circles of the initial teacher education provider microsystem and the school microsystem, with the student practicum lying within the intersecting circles. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the linkages between microsystems containing the learner have a major impact on the learner. He defines the mesosystem in terms of the connections

between microsystems within which the learner moves. Therefore it is not only the direct influence of microsystems on the learner but the linkages between the microsystems that influence the student teacher's learning.

Mesosystem connections can take a number of forms including formal and informal communications. The learning potential in the mesosystem is greater when there are indirect linkages that feature warmth, reciprocity and an "evolving balance of power in favour of the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 212). For example, if associate teachers have a good understanding and appreciation of initial teacher education provider goals and they have trusting relationships with visiting lecturers this will strengthen the mesosystem. Similarly, if visiting lecturers have a good understanding of the school context, constraints and goals, and warm relationships with associate teachers, mesosystem connections are stronger. If, on the other, hand associate teachers view the initial teacher education provider goals as being all about theory and unrelated to practice, the mesosystem will be less supportive. Similarly, if visiting lecturers are critical of associate teachers, the mesosystem will be weaker. Opportunities for dialogue between the key people in the microsystems are likely to strengthen trust and understanding about the goals of the practicum.

Mesosystem connections for associate teachers may come from their role as teacher educators working between the school and the initial teacher education programme. In this study the associate teachers did not see themselves in that way. This manifested as the separation between "practice" and "theory" perceived by the teachers, and indicates compartmentalisation of the practicum and the "campus-based" components of teacher education programmes. This research has shown that for these associate teachers, "the gap" is a reality. The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2010) acknowledged the importance of removing that gap in their report *A Vision for the Teaching Profession* when they stated that:

> The more integrated programmes that set out a clear purpose and where the areas of study are linked are more effective than fragmented programmes. We also know that ITE which links practicum with theory and where providers, schools and teachers are connected, lead to better outcomes. (p. 12)

Change takes time, and energy and funding will be required to support the conversations that are necessary to develop closer relationships, as well as professional learning and development for staff from schools and the initial teacher education provider (Villiers & Mackisack, 2011). Sustaining a collaborative community is difficult (Valencia et al., 2009)

and there are implications for the traditional hegemony of the initial teacher education provider in adopting a partnership model of practicum (Zeichner, 2010). Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that:

> The development potential of the setting is enhanced to the extent that there exist direct and indirect links to power settings through which participants in the original setting can influence allocation for resources and the making of decisions. (p. 256)

In general, the associate teachers in this study spoke about their interactions with most student teachers in positive terms, but the impression they gave was that the balance of power resided with them. Suggestions of power sharing would require major policy shifts by initial teacher education providers and government. Walkington (2007) said that, "Sustainable improvement requires support at the institutional or systemic level where overall attitudes and beliefs that underpin the work between universities and schools are evaluated and challenged" (p. 281). Partnership may be possible but only if there is support for change through genuine collaboration within the whole initial teacher education system.

Figure 6 also shows the exosystem influences upon the micro and mesosystems of the school and the initial teacher education provider as the larger oval enclosing the two clusters of microsystems. Exosystems refer to settings that do not directly involve the learner but indirectly affect what happens to the learner. The community surrounding the school is an exosystem that affects the school, for example through the acceptance of the school by parents and other community members and the support, demands and resources they give to the school.

Another exosystem that influences the microsystem of university-based initial teacher education providers is university policy. Because most teacher education in New Zealand is now university based (McGee et al., 2010), the delivery of initial teacher education programmes is subject to university ways of working (Smith & Tinning, 2011). In the university environment teacher education could be described as the "poor relation" and any changes to the practicum will be constrained by University policies and funding. For example, when the equivalent of the New Zealand Performance Based Research Funding model (PBRF), the Research Assessment Exercise, was introduced in Britain, programmes which had a practicum or clinical component were disadvantaged (Middleton, 2009).

Finally, Figure 6 demonstrates the wider macrosystem. Macrosystems symbolise the consistencies that occur at the level of the culture or society and its belief systems and ideologies. These patterns of beliefs, organisation, and behaviour are influenced by public policy which is an influence over both microsystems of school and initial teacher education provider. Practicum is a political issue. The professional practice component of teacher education programmes is constrained and influenced by the wider education context (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013; McGee et al., 2010). The fiscal situation, for example, determined in part by government policy but also affected by global phenomena, has an important impact on the operation of schools and initial teacher education providers. Political decisions influence initial teacher education priorities and programmes (Smith & Tinning, 2011), including the provision of professional practice experiences for student teachers. The New Zealand Ministry of Education policies for primary schools, such as prioritising literacy and numeracy, the implementation of National Standards, and changes to funding and provision of professional learning and development are also macrosystem influences on the practicum.

At the time of writing, the New Zealand Teachers' Council is also influential in the practicum setting, although after a recent review process, the roles, responsibilities, and configuration of that body are being examined and are likely to change. At present the 2010 regulations require initial teacher education providers to meet minimum requirements for the amount of time student teachers spend in the professional experience component of their programmes, and regulate which staff are able to work in the visiting lecturer role (Ell, 2011). This policy is challenging for initial teacher education providers who are PBRF funded because it takes academic staff away from research work (Beck & Kosnik, 2002b; Mitchell et al., 2007).

In the ecological framework (Figure 6), the student teacher is surrounded by members of the initial teacher education provider community and the school community. The school and the initial teacher education provider systems overlap, suggesting that they are connected by shared understandings around the practicum. This study has revealed that this is not the reality for these associate teachers. They had few shared understandings and were given little support to reflect on their practices, develop their skills or to contribute to the practicum beyond hosting student teachers.

CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSIONS

Conflicting views about the purpose of teacher education, and what teaching is, are core issues which impact on student teachers' practicum experiences and on expectations of the role of the associate teacher. If teaching is viewed as a learned craft then the practicum is an opportunity for student teachers to learn how to do what works from an expert. Alternatively, if teaching is seen as "transformative practice, informed by a critical perspective on information, ideas and practices" (Churchill et al., 2013, p. 38) then the practicum is a vehicle for reflection, theory making and inquiry. These differences are implicit in the changes in terminology for example "teacher training" or "teacher education" and "associate teacher" or "mentor teacher".

Complexity and confusion around the role of the associate teacher are fuelled by the gap between the way the role is described and theorised in the literature, and how it is perceived in the field (Sanders et al., 2005). This study has revealed that the practicum gap reported in many previous studies is still a reality. It also provides some insight into why that is the case in response to calls for studies which explore associate teacher perspectives (Hastings, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2007; Sanders et al., 2005). Most initial teacher education providers have great expectations of associate teachers but those people receive little support, little recognition, and little financial reward (Atputhasamy, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2010). Hoban (2006) said that initial teacher education providers must no longer rely on the goodwill of associate teachers to provide successful learning experiences for student teachers.

Although this study is small, it is intended to add a New Zealand perspective to the extant literature about associate teachers. It serves as a reminder that any changes to practicum practices must recognise and respect the realities of associate teachers rather than relying on anecdotal perceptions of their reality and reports from student teachers. My purpose is well expressed by Grudnoff and Tuck (2003) who say that in "an ideal world the teacher educators and the schools will be involved in a partnership and have a shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching and good teacher education" (p. 39). This research is a beginning step towards that long term goal which will ultimately lead to improved practicum experiences for student teachers.

Policy Recommendations

Practicum is well overdue for reform and those who support student teacher learning need to find ways for all parties to engage, collaborate, and communicate more effectively. The traditional and hierarchical system of practicum should be reviewed as ideological shifts in teaching and learning, and learning to teach, and there is a need to raise the profile of the professional experience component of initial teacher education.

The findings from this study have implications for my institution, for the teacher education sector, and for national policy. In exploring the understandings and experiences of associate teachers I have had to recognise the interconnectedness of the initial teacher education ecosystem and to realise that it is not possible to consider the role of the associate teacher and their professional learning without referencing the rest of the system. From this study the following recommendations can be made. There should be:

- Genuine partnership between the practicum parties. Partnership would mean having representatives from stakeholder communities on initial teacher education provider committees, and giving them a voice. Advisory committees would need to be democratic, balanced, and genuinely consultative. Partnership requires power sharing. If this is not possible within existing structures then those need to be re-examined.

- Mutual respect for all members of practicum community. All members of the practicum community need to recognise, celebrate, and share the strengths that they bring to supporting and facilitating student teacher learning.

- Improved communication and openness so that student teachers are safe to raise concerns when there is conflict between the expectations of the initial teacher education provider and the school.

- Joint professional learning and development opportunities for associate teachers and staff from the initial teacher education provider where they negotiate shared understandings and guidelines in partnership for their work in supporting student teacher learning.

- Joint professional learning and development in curriculum for associate teachers and staff from the initial teacher education provider. All parties need to have shared understanding of what is accepted as sound pedagogical practice and what is expected of student teachers in planning and implementing the curriculum.

- Closer relationships and more fluidity of staffing between schools and initial teacher education providers. Seconding classroom teachers to work with student teachers on campus and having initial teacher education provider staff working in schools is a powerful way of breaking down barriers. Considering the school as a learning community rather than focusing on the individual associate teacher is another strategy for maximising the opportunities for supported learning for student teachers.

- Changes in terminology from associate teacher to mentor teacher, from visiting lecturer to university mentor and from practicum to professional experience, signalling a shift in thinking about student learning in schools.

- Increase in Government funding for initial teacher education programmes to allow time to develop collaborative practicum learning communities.

- Moderation of practicum assessment. This is a challenge but assessment must be clear and transparent. All members of the practicum community, but especially student teachers, must be clear about assessment expectations associated with practicum and know how to meet them. Standardised assessment is not a solution as every class is different, every programme is different, and every student teacher is different.

- Raising the profile of the associate teacher (mentor teacher) role by recognition of mentoring excellence as a career pathway for those teachers, and supporting formal study in mentoring.

Further Research

As a result of sustained exploration in an area of inquiry over time it is inevitable that more questions will arise. Further research is needed to explore how student teacher learning takes place in the practicum. What value is added to student teacher learning by spending time in a school? In these neoliberal conservative political times we need to have evidence of what the professional experience component of teacher education provides that cannot be offered in other ways. There is a need for further investigation into what the practicum contributes to learning to teach.

This study has presented the role of the associate teacher as seen and experienced by teachers in one school. It would be interesting to compare the findings from this school with others to see how school culture influences perceptions of the associate teacher role. The associate teachers in this research said that they were influenced a great deal by their own experiences

but many of the teachers in this study had limited teaching experience in other schools. An area for further study is whether experience in a range of schools has an impact on associate teacher practices.

It would be useful to examine what we mean by 'best' or 'exemplary' practice. Some researchers suggest that there is a link between teacher efficacy and effective supervision of student teachers (Clarke et al., 2013; McDonald, 2009) but that link is contested elsewhere (Crasborn et al, 2011; Margolis, 2007). Student teachers often find themselves being presented with conflicting models of best practice and it is timely to examine what the practicum parties mean by best practice and how those ideas are informed. There are indications in the research literature and in this study that student teachers are likely to receive limited subject specific feedback from their associate teachers (Valencia et al., 2009). One reason may be that primary teachers who become associate teachers do not have depth of content knowledge across all curriculum areas (Hudson, 2007) which would benefit from further study.

This study has revealed the potential for a model of initial teacher education which is based on practicum as a learning community. There is a need for research on alternative models from the perspectives of all members of the practicum community - student teachers, associate teachers, and visiting lecturers, as well as those who employ graduating teachers.

Limitations of the Research

Research is framed by the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the researcher. A defining characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals have stories to tell which are valid and useful. This case study research is typical of that tradition, being small and site-specific, looking at a small number of associate teachers in one school in some depth over time.

The nature of my pre-existing relationship with the school and these associate teachers could be perceived as a limitation and I have acknowledged this. I was humbled by the openness of these associate teachers and have tried to be honest and true to them in my work. I gave them transcripts of their interviews to read and correct, and although the project was sanctioned by

the principal as a school-wide professional learning focus, they knew that they could ask to have their contributions excluded from the reported findings.

While this study presents what associate teachers said were their perceptions, it does not investigate if they act in accordance with their professed beliefs, which might be perceived as a limitation. This research was not designed to compare associate teacher perceptions with the perceptions of the other members of the triad. Thus the "truth" of what they were saying is not verifiable and objective. In adopting a qualitative stance for this research I have acknowledged the "socially constructed nature of reality" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14).

Using on-line discussion might be seen as a limitation of the study as it did not facilitate genuine engagement and discussion among participants. It was a barrier for many of the associate teachers and hampered free and genuine interaction with the reading material. Teachers' levels of engagement with the reading material are thus uncertain and their engagement and reflection on the literature may have been compromised.

Finally this study has been focussed on one third of the practicum triad. It does not explore and analyse the microsystem of the initial teacher education provider or it's influence on the student teacher.

Final Comments

The purpose of this case study was to investigate and report on the perspectives of a number of associate teachers. In the process I have found a lack of shared understanding about the associate teacher role and the need for more involvement and communication between the practicum parties. I began by looking at associate teachers and ended by looking at initial teacher education as a whole. As teacher educators in universities we must continue to work towards developing closer relationships and mutual respect between schools and initial teacher education providers, with the goal of providing purposeful professional learning experiences for student teachers. Change is not easy but we need to re-configure and reinvigorate the practicum with goodwill, respect, and open- mindedness.

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APPENDICES

Analysis of initial interviews: Codes emerged directly from the transcripts in response to the questions - What is the role of the associate teacher?

Names removed										
Give yourself			x							
High expectations			x							
Open an honest				x						
Flexible				x						
Check planning				x						
Find out goals				x				Help set goals		
Personal reflection				x						Help identify needs
Facilitate student teacher reflection				x		x				
Answer questions					x					
Be approachable					x					
Be passionate about teaching					x					
Good relationships					x		x			
Help with management						x				
Be organised							x	x		x
Checking planning							x			
Friend									x	
Set expectations									x	

Appendix B
A reflective approach to primary school associate teacher professional development in New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET FOR
PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education at the University of Otago. The purpose of the study is to trial an approach to professional development for primary school associate teachers to support them in their role. The professional development will be largely based around readings, reflection, on-line discussions and some action related to your work with student teachers.

My interest in this area comes from my work in practicum settings with student teachers and my awareness of the lack of support from the provider institution for critical examination of the role of the associate teacher. The professional development programme will be implemented throughout 2010.

What Type of Participants are being sought?

All teachers in the school will be required to participate in the school wide professional development and all are invited to participate in the research project.

What will Participants be Asked to Do?

Should you agree to take part in the research project, you will be interviewed at the start and the end of the project. All teachers in the school will be required to attend a small number of face to face meetings, engage in on-line discussions and reflection and to implement something new into their practice as associate teachers.

Interviews:

I would like to talk to you about your views on the role of the associate teacher in practicum settings in general and about your strengths and needs as an associate teacher. An interview guide is enclosed to give you an idea of the kinds of questions I will ask. I would like to talk to you for about an hour in the first interview and about an hour in the one at the end of the year. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed and you will be asked to read through the transcripts to check for accuracy.

Discussions:

The on-line discussions will be accessed via Moodle – an e-learning platform. Moodle is an internet site where items and discussion comments can be posted. Instruction on how to access this site will be provided. The use of Moodle will allow you to make comments at an hour, time and place convenient you where you have internet access. Eight discussions will be held during the year, each of two weeks duration and you will be asked to contribute twice to each discussion. Discussions may be based on readings, questions, images or video footage.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the research aspect of this project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?

You may withdraw from participation in the research component of the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?

The information that I collect will be from interview transcripts, on-line discussion comments and from the notes taken from audio tapes in face to face sessions.

The interview guide provided outlines the broad question areas that will be covered in each of the two interviews, however in the interests of allowing for individual perspectives I will use an open interviewing approach which should allow the interview to develop in response to your comments. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The information will be analysed and used to write my Ed.D thesis. It may also be used in conference presentations, as a basis for professional development presentations or as background to journal articles. Those who participate in the research will not be individually identified and all of the information collected from the interviews will be confidential to me, my supervisor and the people who transcribe the interviews. I will present a summary of the research findings to participants and you are welcome to see a full copy of the completed study if you wish to.

The findings of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity by the use of pseudonyms.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned previously will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Helen Trevethan
Department of Curriculum Development and Teaching
University of Otago College of Education
Ph 03 479 4230
Email helen.trevethan@otago.ac.nz

OR

Greg Burnett
Department of Education Studies and Professional Practice
University of Otago College of Education
Ph 03 479 5464
Email   greg.burnett@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix C
A reflective approach to primary school associate teacher professional development in New Zealand

CONSENT FORM FOR

PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-
1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;

3. Personal identifying information will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed;

4. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance. Instead questioning will depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.

5. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

I agree to take part in this project.

....
      (Signature of participant)   (Date)

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix D
Initial Interview questions

Interview Guides for Teachers

The following guide will be used in the initial interviews with teachers before the professional development begins.

Background information

- How long have you been teaching? How long have you been at this school? Have you taught elsewhere? Have you been an associate teacher before coming here?

- Why did you apply for a job here?

- What preparation/instruction/support/professional development have you had for your work with student teachers?

- Tell me about the effectiveness or limitations of any professional development you have had to date

Role of the associate teacher

- What is role of the associate teacher?

- How do you know this?

- What is the most satisfying aspect of being an associate teacher?

- And the least?

- What aspects of that role do you feel strong in?

- What areas do you need to work on?

- What kinds of support would be most useful to you?

- Do you have any other comments to make

Appendix E
Post interview questions

Interview Guides for Teachers

- How did you find the professional development project?

- Tell me about your personal project.

- How engaged were you throughout the year?

- Have you learned anything new?

- Have you learned anything new about the role of the associate teacher?

- How has your thinking about the role of the associate teacher changed since you began in the project?

- Has the project had any impact on your practice as an associate teacher?