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Contemporary Research Topics

work-based learning 7

November 2025

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BECOMING TOGETHER: PRACTICE, IDENTITY, AND THE EMERGENT WHOLE

Jan Hendrik Roodt and Rachel McNamara

Mā te kimi ka kite, mā te kite ka mōhio, mā te mōhio ka mārama
Through seeking, one finds. Through finding, one gains knowledge. Through knowledge, one attains enlightenment

This seventh issue of *Scope* (*Work-based Learning*) explores becoming as a layered and shared process. This theme resonates with John Dewey's idea of growth through lived experience, with French philosopher Edgar Morin's understanding of complexity and recursive transformation, and with the European educational traditions of Bildung and dannelse, German and Danish terms that describe the ongoing shaping of self in relation to the world, others, and society. These perspectives do not stand apart. They mingle through the pages of this issue, informing, challenging, and often complementing one another.

Becoming is not a straight path. It gathers meaning through participation, dialogue, and response. The Kawa model, developed by Canadian occupational therapist Michael Iwama and grounded in Japanese tradition, offers a helpful metaphor: like a river (*kawa* in Japanese) our lives are shaped by the flow and resistance of our surroundings. The river bends, carries debris, slows in some places, and deepens in others. Our sense of identity, like that river, forms through movement, through encounters, and through the landscape we inhabit.

We change as we take action, and the context we work within changes, too. The individual and the collective move together. In this sense, becoming is not simply about gaining skill. It involves a kind of artful mastery—of the self, of our stance toward work, and of how we meet the Other.

These writings remind us that becoming does not happen alone. Each contribution matters. Each question asked, and each practice shared, adds to the whole. Across this issue are moments of inquiry, reflection, and transformation. They deepen what it means to take part, to show up fully, and to keep becoming through seeking, through doing, and through insight that gathers over time.

Ko te pae tawhiti whāia kia tata, ko te pae tata whakamaua kia tina
Seek the distant horizon so it may become close; hold fast to what is near

In continuing this journey of becoming, we turn toward the spaces where practice meets possibility. Here, learning is not confined to curriculum or credentials; it pulses through conversation, through shared labour, and through the quiet moments of doubt and discovery. The horizon shifts as we move, and with each step, we reorient ourselves toward what matters.

Come with us, not as passive readers but as fellow travellers, as we follow the shifting waterline of the riverbank or beach, the place where ideas meet and patterns of thought converge. Just as waves carry shells and driftwood

to the shore, each contribution in this issue brings material that nourishes new understanding. These works inform and invite. They ripple outward, offering many points of entry into the layered terrain of *Scope* (*Work-based Learning*) issue 7.

We begin this 2025 journey on solid ground, a rock if you will, anchored by an article on ako. Glenys Ker and her co-authors remind us that learning is not transactional but relational. It is shaped by lived experience, by the presence of others, and by the encounters that contour our professional selves.

From this foundation, we move with the current toward a discussion piece by Otago Polytechnic Occupational Therapy and Engineering lecturers. The authors explore the shift from traditional campus-based programmes to work-augmented degrees, asking what it means to change course, and what is carried or left behind in the process. Tiju Mathew Thomas continues this flow, navigating the place of mixed-mode learning in engineering education. His article challenges us to reimagine context, to avoid disengagement, and to embrace the collaborative opportunities that form when disciplines meet.

As we follow the river to the ocean and coastline, new horizons open. Languages shift like waves; perspectives widen like the tide. Celine Kearney from Wintec leads us into transdisciplinary waters with an account of adapting English language teaching to changing cohorts. Her reflections highlight the strength of community and the work of translation across cultures and fields. Anthony Dady carries this focus further, showing how a project to connect church congregations to their communities involved dialogue and ebb and flow between self and collective. His work reminds us that becoming is tidal: recursive, relational, and rhythmic.

Ritesh Navin Kumar and Kylie New's writings extend this rhythm, offering insights into cultural identity and its evolution. Kumar delves into his heritage to ground his mathematics pedagogy and research, while New reports on how an internship in Japan transformed two culinary graduates. Their pieces show us that becoming is not linear. It meanders, it doubles back, and it gathers depth over time.

Next, Martin Andrew, Steve Henry, and Jeremy Taylor take us into doctoral waters, where reflection becomes a sounding line. Their work charts a liminal space, like a shifting sandbar, where the ground beneath is never fixed. Certainty dissolves, and from the turbulence new forms of professional practice and identity begin to surface.

From here, we move into the ethical waters of research. Sam Mann, Ruth Myers, and Glenys Forsyth ask what it means to navigate with integrity, to seek mastery not as control but as attunement to the currents around us. Their work calls for a new approach in professional practice spaces to ethics as becoming: both an art and a science, a practice of balance as much as direction.

Leigh Quadling-Miernik's contribution charts a voyage in constant motion. Each place in her journey leaves traces like shells on the beach, shaping and reshaping how she sees herself. What emerges is a travel record as a story of academic and professional identity forming at the meeting point of the global and the personal.

Finally, we reach the cliffs at the edge of the shoreline. Tim Lynch's article stands there, challenging established academic norms and reimagining how written work lives within learning. His piece moves like a wave: crashing, receding, returning, restless yet full of possibility. The coastline here reminds us that becoming is formed in that restless play of tide and rock.

The edge of the ocean is never stable. Each tide redraws the line between land and water. Benoit Mandelbrot, the mathematician who coined the term fractal, reminds us that a coastline cannot be precisely measured. Its length depends on the scale of our tools. So too with becoming: it is felt more than fixed, shaped through currents of learning, tension, and care. And just as rivers gather many streams before meeting the sea, each contribution here flows toward the whole.

As the opening whakataukī reminds us, understanding unfolds not all at once, but through seeking, through doing, and through slow layers of insight. The tide carries much more than water. Our cover image, taken at Smails Beach in the far south of Aotearoa New Zealand, catches that play of sun on tide and breakers, where flowers lean forward into salt air. As a whole, the contributions to this issue present identity as something we bring, offer, and let grow, together, in motion.

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BECOMING THROUGH AKO: HOW LIVED EXPERIENCE SHAPES PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN PRACTICE-BASED EDUCATION

Glenys Ker, Rachel van Gorp and John Gualter

INTRODUCTION

In today's vocational education environment, how we come to know ourselves as educators is inseparable from how we support others to do the same. This article considers the dynamic and relational nature of professional identity, how it is shaped and interpreted through lived experience, critical reflection, and reciprocal relationships. We believe that at the heart of our practice is ako, a Māori philosophy that sees teaching and learning as an interconnected, evolving process. We position ako as a way of being that transforms the facilitator–learner relationship into a shared journey of growth.

Our work at Capable NZ, a faculty of Otago Polytechnic, is situated within a distinctive work- based learning model. We support adult learners, many of whom bring significant cultural and professional knowledge but have been marginalised by traditional education, to gain qualifications through reflection on real-world experience. As facilitators, we do not deliver knowledge from above; instead, we co-create learning pathways that honour what learners already know and what they seek to become. This process continually reshapes our own professional identities. Through reciprocal engagement, we often transform alongside our learners.

Ako, as expressed by Pere (1982), is a spiritually and relationally grounded Māori concept in which teacher and learner are co-contributors to the learning relationship. Bishop and Glynn (1999) remind us that ako is grounded in the values of whakapapa (our genealogical connections), whanaungatanga (the relationships we build and sustain), and manaakitanga (the care and respect we show one another), reflecting a way of being deeply woven into the worldview of Aoteoroa New Zealand. There are parallels with Freire's (1970) dialogical pedagogy, which analyses and critiques the banking model (in which students are conceived as containers to be filled) and highlights mutual engagement; however, ako carries unique cultural, historical, and spiritual dimensions. Ako locates learning in relationships of interdependence, cultural identity, and ancestral connection.

As three Pākehā educators, we acknowledge we are not speaking on behalf of Māori. We aim to walk alongside Indigenous knowledge systems, honouring the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and recognising our obligations as tangata Tiriti. We each bring a distinct lived experience: Rachel as a neurodivergent business academic, Glenys as an educator and career practitioner with business experience, and John as a former police investigator turned facilitator. What connects us is a common understanding that learning takes place in our workplaces, communities, and everyday lives. Identity is not fixed but continually shaped through our experiences, relationships and reflection.

This article is structured around our three reflective narratives, each illustrating how ako informs our facilitation and our professional becoming. We then synthesise these insights to offer implications for practice and identity development in work-based and vocational education. We aim to provide both an authentic account of our experiences and a conceptual framework for practitioners seeking to engage with ako in meaningful, culturally responsive ways.

CONTEXT: AKO AND WORK-BASED LEARNING AT CAPABLE NZ

Ako is not a technique we apply at Capable NZ; it is the foundation of how we engage with learners. It calls us to respect the mana of each person, to build trust and reciprocity, and to remain open to being changed by the learning relationship ourselves. As educators, we are not neutral technicians. We are cultural participants, accountable to our context and to the people we serve.

In Capable NZ's Independent Learning Pathway (ILP), learners gain formal qualifications through critical reflection on their professional and personal experience. The role of the facilitator is to co-design a learning journey with their learner, one that validates experience, brings to light tacit knowledge, and links theory to practice. Contemporary theorists of work-based learning (Costley et al., 2010) and lifelong learning (Jarvis, 2006) argue that identity, knowledge, and context are intimately linked.

Our approach has no place for the traditional hierarchy between educator and learner, instead fostering a learning partnership built on mutual respect and shared expertise. Ker (2017) describes effective facilitation as requiring elegant flexibility: the ability to adapt, respond, and pivot with the learner. She labels this the dance of facilitation, where the facilitator knows when to step forward and when to step back, requiring humility and observation. It is less about leading and more about co-travelling. Mezirow (1998) believes that transformative learning is possible when both learners and educators examine their assumptions, reflect critically, and open themselves to new perspectives.

Ako calls on us to be culturally responsive. It asks us to truly see the learner, to understand how they learn, what gets in the way, who they are, and where they come from. It invites us to stay open, to listen, and to value the diverse ways in which knowledge is shaped by culture and experience. We have found that creating safe, inclusive, and affirming spaces is not just good practice; it is essential when working with Māori, Pasifika, and neurodivergent learners. Culturally sustaining education (Berryman, 2018; Gay, 2010) emphasises the importance of fostering relationships that affirm identity and promote community connection. At Capable NZ, we continue to embrace and embed kaupapa Māori values, such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and tino rangatiratanga, into the heart of our facilitation.

The following narratives illustrate what ako looks like in our everyday work: how it shapes our questions, influences our roles, and changes us in the process. To visualise these interwoven influences, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of ako-informed professional identity development.

We present three reflective narratives as co-authors and colleagues, each illustrating a different facet of professional identity development through ako. Glenys explores the concept of "fit" focusing on the alignment between facilitator and learner, and how transformative partnerships can be formed across education, career development, business, and elite sport. Rachel's practice is shaped by her lived experience of being neurodivergent, which informs her inclusive and neuro-affirming approach to facilitation in the business qualifications. John brings the depth of his investigative background into his educational practice, using listening, storytelling, and co-reflection as powerful tools to support growth in both learners and facilitators.

Figure 1. Ako-Informed Professional Identity Development. This model illustrates the interconnected elements that shape facilitator identity in practice-based education, with ako at its centre. Each petal represents a key influence: reciprocal learning, reflective practice, cultural responsiveness, and the distinct contributions of Glenys, Rachel, and John. Adapted with AI assistance (ChatGPT, 2025).

This model reflects our shared understanding of facilitator identity development and the foundational role of ako in shaping our evolving practice. Our stories demonstrate that identity in professional practice is dynamic, relational, and co-constructed through lived experience and learning with others. We conclude by reflecting on the shared implications for practice, urging educators to honour lived experience, foster a relational fit, and embrace ako as a transformative model of professional development.

GLENYS: FINDING FIT AND PURPOSE THROUGH PRACTICE

Throughout my four decades as an educator, one question has consistently guided my approach: how do we ensure that learning is meaningful, respectful, and focused on the learner? Early in my secondary school teaching career, I recognised that students were often disengaged with traditional classroom methods. I taught subjects like shorthand, accounting, computing, and economics, and students were often bored, sitting in a hot classroom and not always interested in the topic. I began embedding applied experiences, such as outdoor education, into the curriculum. For example, a unit where students planned and managed a camp enabled them to use budgeting, logistics, and collaborative decision-making in a real- world setting. These experiences showed me that when learning is contextual, relational, and responsive to the student's world, it becomes transformative.

My doctoral research (Ker, 2017) focused on creating an alternative pathway into higher education for experienced adults, one grounded in a learner-first philosophy. The Independent Learning Pathway (ILP) was designed to validate professional and personal experience as legitimate sources of knowledge and to support learners in reflecting critically on that experience to achieve formal qualifications. The framework is constructed on key principles: trust, fit, facilitator-learner relationship, skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to the role of facilitator, as well as a learner-first focus, which places the learner as the expert in their own lives. As facilitators, our role is not to deliver content; it is to facilitate learning. We act as guides, coaches, and reflective partners. The role of facilitator is a relational one, drawing from academic and professional expertise. Facilitators must possess in-depth knowledge of adult learning, critical reflection, and work-based learning, as well as the interpersonal skills to engage with learners with empathy, curiosity, and cultural humility. Our multiple identities (what we as facilitators bring with us to the relationship) help build credibility and connection with learners who may have felt alienated by what they perceive as traditional educational spaces.

The concept of fit refers to the alignment between facilitator and learner: how we connect, communicate, and adapt to one another's style and context. Fit is not accidental; it is co-created through listening, observing, trust, and mutual respect. Sometimes this may mean adjusting our language, pace, or ways of questioning. It may be about disclosing something about our own learning journey. Sharing my story, when appropriate, can bridge the perceived gap between facilitator and learner. It signifies that I, too, am in a process of becoming, and that vulnerability and reflection are shared practices.

Many of the learners I support are Māori, Pasifika, or from neurodiverse communities. Their experiences continually challenge me to reflect on my assumptions. One Māori learner completing a degree in applied management used her portfolio to revitalise a whānau-based enterprise grounded in whenua and whakapapa. Her vision of leadership was collective, intergenerational, and anchored in cultural responsibility. Working with her reminded me to slow down, ask more questions to understand, create space for wānanga, and recognise the role of whānau in the learning process. These are not adjustments to content. They are relational commitments to ako.

My practice is also informed by kaupapa Māori principles, including manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and tino rangatiratanga, as well as culturally responsive pedagogy (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). These frameworks reinforce that education is never neutral. When we uphold mana, affirm cultural knowledge, and create relational accountability, we help shift education from an extractive process to a collaborative one. This supports not only learner transformation but also facilitator transformation.

Working with neurodivergent learners has deepened my understanding of the systemic barriers many face. One athlete with dyslexia and ADHD had spent years telling themselves they might as well stick to playing hockey, as tertiary education was not for them. By shifting this internal deficit thinking to a mode of engagement using oral storytelling, visual mapping, and reflective discussion, he was able to connect his professional experience as an athlete to academic theory. When he completed his portfolio and oral assessment, he said, "This is the first time I've seen my experience as valid." That is the essence of ako: shared recognition, mutual growth.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) reinforces the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. I invite learners to set their own goals for their study timetable, define how they want feedback to occur, and choose learning methods that resonate with them. These discussions encourage a shift in identity. They begin to see themselves as knowledgeable, skilled, and reflective practitioners.

Another element of my work focuses on supporting elite athletes as they transition away from high-performance sport, understanding that sport is not just a career; it is a core part of their identity. Leaving that world requires what Ebaugh (1988) called role exit—a redefinition of the self. I work with athletes to identify the transferable skills embedded in their sporting life, such as leadership, resilience, and strategy, and reframe these as assets in new domains. My colleagues and I have presented this model nationally (Gualter et al., 2024) as an example of how education can honour alternative pathways and identities.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model helps athletes reflect on past performance, draw connections to theory, and then apply new insights in unfamiliar contexts, such as governance, business, or community leadership. As they construct new narratives, I witness profound shifts in their sense of identity. I walk alongside them, offering critical questions, validation, and language that gives shape to what they already know.

Across all these contexts, including education, business, career development, and sport, I see my role not as static but evolving. I am continually learning from the learners I work with. My facilitation is grounded in the principles of transformation, reflection, and ako. It is not about knowing more. It is about creating an environment where knowledge can be recognised, named, and applied with integrity.

RACHEL: OWNING MY NEURODIVERGENCE, EMPOWERING OTHERS

My journey as an educator has been shaped by the often challenging process of recognising and understanding my neurodivergence, and how I understand and see the world. For many years, I believed I was not smart enough. It was not until later in life that I was diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia, and Irlen Syndrome. Having a diagnosis allowed me to make sense of my earlier struggles with learning and enabled me to begin reframing my identity as both a learner and an educator. As I came to understand myself better, I also began to rethink how I could support others to learn. On reflection, I was already doing this in other environments, for example, as a gym instructor. I was always aware that clients needed various ways and opportunities to get fit and feel good about themselves. A one-way-for-all approach did not work.

In my research on neurodiversity in vocational education (van Gorp, 2022), I found that many neurodivergent learners had internalised deficit-based narratives. Many saw themselves as failing students rather than as capable individuals whose inflexible systems had failed, which mirrored my own experience. Embracing my neurodivergence has become a foundation of my practice, allowing me to connect with learners not through sympathy but through shared understanding.

This connection is supported by the research of Clouder et al. (2020), who argue that neurodivergent learners often experience institutional exclusion and stigma. When systems privilege linear, standardised pathways, they neglect the flexibility that defines human understanding. In my experience, change begins with a story. Sharing my journey has helped break the silence that surrounds learning differences. When I say, "I used to feel dumb, too," many students respond with relief. That mutual recognition softens shame. We laugh, reflect, and begin to shift the frame from deficit to strength.

I now facilitate through a neuro-affirming and trauma-informed lens. Drawing on Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018), I design teaching and learning environments that treat learner variability as the norm. I provide multiple pathways for engagement, representation, and expression. This is not just an inclusive strategy; it is ethically essential. Many learners carry invisible scars from their personal and educational experiences. As Carello and Butler (2014) explain, trauma-informed teaching recognises that learning environments must be emotionally safe, especially for those who have felt excluded, judged, or unseen.

In partnership with learners, I co-develop tools that affirm agency. I like to use a "strengths storyboard," for instance, where a learner visually maps key learning experiences across their work, community, and personal life. Another is a "learning preference matrix," which helps learners identify the sensory, social, and cognitive conditions that support or hinder engagement. For example, one learner who was overwhelmed with noise and task requirements discovered that working in short, focused bursts improved her confidence. As she said, "It feels like I get to choose, not just keep up." Learning about new strategies is fun, and learners often share their own ideas with me.

These shifts in practice often lead to deep and meaningful shifts in identity. Learners who once saw education as 'not being for them' begin to describe themselves as capable and purposeful. These revolutions are powerful for learners, including Māori, Pasifika, disabled, and neurodivergent learners, who have too often been asked to adapt to systems that were not designed for them. When we become learner-centred and focus on the learner's lived experiences and acknowledge their ways of knowing, ako moves beyond being an educational concept to become an ethical stance.

Completing my own Master of Professional Practice reinforced this understanding. I was initially reluctant to engage in the programme, thinking it was for others, but I soon discovered that it was also a reclamation of my own learning identity. Navigating academic systems while managing dyslexia, ADHD, and Irlen Syndrome gave me firsthand insight into the value of relationships, affirmation, and flexibility. Being genuinely understood and supported to succeed in ways that recognised how I learn was a transformative experience. It taught me that identity work is emotional work. It is also relational and political.

This journey led me to develop a teaching practice that integrates Universal Design for Learning, trauma-informed pedagogy, and inclusive design. I share this work through educator workshops, a Neurodiversity Community of Practice, and an annual symposium. These initiatives aim to change not just practice but mindset. Inclusion requires a shift in how we understand knowledge, learning, and identity.

As an educator, I no longer aim to fit into inherited models. I aim to remake them. My practice is embedded in reciprocity, care, and cultural humility. I bring my whole self into the learning space, and I invite learners to do the same. In this shared process of becoming, ako is alive. It is a living, relational practice that honours the complexity and strength of each learner's journey and my own.

JOHN: FROM DETECTIVE TO FACILITATOR, LISTENING FOR LEARNING

Before working in tertiary education as an assessor and facilitator, I spent over two decades in the police force. During that time, I led complex investigations, managed operational teams, and trained new detectives. Over time, I realised that what energised me most was not the authority or the action, but the chance to mentor and develop others. This realisation drew me into adult education, and eventually to Capable NZ. Transferring from investigator to educator required me to rethink my professional identity and to unlearn some of the ways I had previously positioned myself.

Pursuing qualifications in adult learning provided me with new insights into how people grow, change, and reflect. I enjoyed engaging with theories such as Knowles and colleagues' andragogy (Knowles et al., 2015), which reminded me that adult learners are mostly self-directed and experience-rich, and they will only learn deeply if the subject matter is of interest to them. But it was the realisation that ako could guide my practice that transformed how I now see my role. As a detective, I was trained to gather information, find answers, and make judgments, but as a facilitator, I listen differently. I focus on co-construction, empathy, and storytelling.

Many of the learners I support come from high-pressure, practical fields, including emergency services, defence, aviation, and elite sport. These learners often arrive unsure of their academic ability, yet with a lifetime of professional expertise. My task is to help them see that their lived experiences already contain the seeds of knowledge. Their challenge is not a lack of insight, but a lack of recognition of their insight as valid. That is where ako enters—not as a strategy I apply to them, but as a relational process we engage in together.

Storytelling is a key part of my practice. I often share a story from my time in the police, where I led a multi-agency operation that required split-second decisions, ethical clarity, and eam trust. After telling the story, I invite learners to reflect on a parallel experience in their career and then support them to analyse it through a theoretical lens, such as adaptive leadership or moral reasoning. One learner, a senior paramedic, told me, "I didn't realise my practice involved theory until I saw it in your story, which then helped me make sense of mine."

These conversations model ako in action. We both bring knowledge, and through discussion and engagement, we both grow.

My background in cognitive interviewing has also shaped how I facilitate reflection. I ask learners to recall significant professional moments, then prompt them to describe what they saw, felt, and did in those moments. I might ask, "What guided your decision in that moment?" or "What principles were you drawing from without even knowing it?" These questions surface tacit knowledge. They help learners make the invisible visible, enabling connections between practice and theory to emerge organically.

Flexibility is essential. I enter each session with a structure in mind, but I let the learner's story shape the path we take. My training as a jazz musician supports this. In jazz, you listen, respond, and improvise within a framework. Facilitation is much the same. There is rhythm, tone, and flow, but no fixed script. The learner's story is the melody, and my role is to accompany, not dominate.

In addition to conversation, I use scenario-based reflection and journaling. I ask learners to revisit real events and consider them from new theoretical or ethical perspectives. Over time, these journal entries become evidence of learning and a springboard for academic writing. This practice aligns with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, where experience is the starting point for reflection, conceptualisation, and action. It is also deeply aligned with ako, which recognises the learner's world as a legitimate and powerful site of knowledge.

My own Master of Professional Practice research focused on how Defence Force learners navigate the ILP. What emerged from that work, and what I continue to observe daily, is that transformation happens when learners see themselves differently. One senior military learner initially asked, "is my experience academic enough?" Through deep reflection and validation, he realised that his leadership decisions were not only significant but also grounded in complex frameworks. By the time he presented his portfolio, he had moved from self-doubt to confidence. He was no longer just describing his work; he was also explaining it. He was teaching from it. Witnessing that shift reshaped my own identity. I stopped seeing myself as a former detective who had moved into education. I began seeing myself as a facilitator of insight.

In every interaction, I focus on the learner as the hero of the story. I am there as a mentor and companion, helping them uncover what they already know. This approach reframes learning from transmission to transformation. It honours lived experience and recognises that we become educators not by mastering theory alone, but by entering into authentic, reciprocal relationships.

Ako is the frame that holds this work, acknowledging that learning is a shared experience, authority is relational, and growth is a mutual process. As learners grow into reflective, confident, and academically proficient practitioners, I grow alongside them. Their stories, insights, and challenges shape who I am becoming as an educator. That, to me, is the heart of ako in action.

LEARNER IDENTITY: SHIFTS, AGENCY AND BECOMING

At Capable NZ, we work with learners who often arrive feeling unsure about their academic potential. Many have been successful in their professional lives, yet they carry doubts shaped by past educational experiences. Some have never considered themselves learners. For others, education was something they had to survive rather than something they could thrive in. In these early moments, our role is to create a relational space where identity can shift safely and meaningfully. That space is grounded in ako.

We approach each learner as a whole person. We do not just look at their career or qualifications. We also explore their cultural background, community roles, personal experiences, and values. These become central to the learning process, which aligns with the concept of "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992), which recognises

the everyday knowledge that learners bring from their homes, workplaces, and communities as powerful resources for education. When we start with what learners already know and who they already are, we affirm identity rather than require its erasure.

Facilitating this shift involves more than encouragement. It requires an approach grounded in recognition, where learners are seen, heard, and respected. As Williams, Berger, and McClendon (2005) suggest, inclusive excellence in education is not just about access, it is about fostering environments where diverse learners can succeed on their own terms. At Capable NZ, success is not narrowly defined by grades or conformity to academic conventions, but rather by growth, insight, and the ability to identify and apply one's learning with confidence and integrity.

These identity shifts are often audible in the language learners begin to use. Phrases such as, ";I didn't think I could do this" are gradually replaced by "I'm proud of what I've achieved" or "Now I understand how I learn." One Māori learner described completing their degree as enhancing their mana, not just for themselves but for their whānau. Others have spoken about finally feeling legitimate in their professional fields. These are more than reflective statements; they are declarations of becoming.

The concept of becoming positions identity not as a fixed state but as a continuous, relational process. Wenger's (1998) notion of learning as participation in a community of practice reinforces this. Identity is shaped by what we do, who we do it with, and how we perceive ourselves in relation to others. In our context, the ILP facilitates this by allowing learners to narrate, reflect, and analyse their professional journeys. Through that process, they are not only demonstrating knowledge. They are actively reshaping their sense of self.

Critical reflection plays a vital role in this process. Mezirow (1991, 1998) emphasises that transformation occurs when learners examine the assumptions that shape their perspectives. At Capable NZ, we ask learners to engage in that level of reflection, which can often be difficult, even confronting, particularly when it involves revisiting past failures or experiences that have limited your identity. However, when learners are supported to reflect within a safe, relational space, they begin to reclaim their narratives. They shift from being recipients of education to active meaning-makers.

Ako reinforces that learning is not a solitary act. It is co-constructed, emotionally situated, and embedded in relationships. Our openness as facilitators helps create the conditions for learner transformation. When we share something of ourselves, ask meaningful questions, and stay present to what is emerging, we invite learners to step into new possibilities for who they are and who they are becoming.

In this way, the transformation of learner identity is not incidental but intentional and central to our practice. It reminds us that education is about connection, not just content. It is about the courage to see oneself differently, and to be seen. It is also about realising that learning can be a space of belonging, power, and possibility.

PROFESSIONAL BECOMING: IDENTITY AS A PRACTICE

Our professional identities, like those of our learners, are not set in stone. They evolve through our relationships, values, and the experiences that shape our work. At Capable NZ, becoming is embedded in our practice, not separate from it. Each facilitation, reflection, and learner story challenges us to grow. This reciprocal process reflects ako as a relational way of working. We are not simply delivering education; we are learning alongside those we support.

Dialogue and collaboration with colleagues have been essential to this growth. Our shared conversations form a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), supporting reflection, innovation, and a shared sense of purpose. Through this, our distinct approaches have influenced one another. Glenys's emphasis on facilitator-learner fit, Rachel's neuro-affirming practice, and John's use of storytelling all reflect a commitment to inclusive, relational learning.

Becoming a facilitator in this context requires more than content knowledge. It calls for presence, cultural responsiveness, and humility. We draw on our diverse professional backgrounds not as add-ons, but as integral to our approach to connecting with learners. Whether through business, sport, policing, neurodiversity, or career coaching, our past experiences inform how we listen, support, and respond. Transformation, as Mezirow (1998) reminds us, requires critical self-reflection. But in our experience, it is also deeply relational. Ako invites us to be changed by the learning process. In modelling reflection and vulnerability, we offer learners a space to do the same. In this way, we continually learn from and with one another. We have come to understand professional identity as profoundly personal and inherently collective. When we engage in ako, we offer parts of ourselves, our failures, insights, and hopes to support someone else's growth. In doing so, we change too.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

From our shared journeys as facilitators, the following practices have emerged as central to learner success and our professional development:

- Recognise lived experience as expertise. Learners bring valuable knowledge shaped by their work, culture, and life experiences. Validating this is essential for meaningful learning.
- Build trust through relational connection. Getting to know the learner's world and context allows us to tailor our approach and foster mutual respect.
- Be open to reciprocal learning. Sharing aspects of our own stories, when appropriate, creates connection and models vulnerability.
- Facilitate reflective and narrative practice. Structured reflection helps surface tacit knowledge and link experience to theory.
- Understand identity as co-constructed. Learning is not just about acquiring knowledge. It is about becoming. Our identities, like those of our learners, evolve through the process.

These practices reflect ako in action. They support inclusive, learner-centred education and remind us that teaching is not a technical act. It is a relational one. When we honour who learners are and stay open to who we are becoming, education becomes a shared journey of transformation. By viewing professional identity as an evolving practice rather than a fixed status, we contribute to a deeper understanding of what it means to "become" an educator in a work-based learning context. Ultimately, we hope that sharing our journeys inspires others to value their lived experiences as integral to their ongoing professional identity and growth.

AI statement

We acknowledge that Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) was used solely to refine grammar and improve readability. These tools were employed to enhance clarity while maintaining the intended meaning and context. The authors independently reviewed and checked the final work for accuracy and authenticity.

Rachel van Gorp is an accomplished Principal Lecturer with a wide-ranging background, including experience in banking, personal training, massage therapy, business ownership, mentorship, and volunteering. As a member of the Otago Polytechnic School of Business, Rachel brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her undergraduate teaching programmes.

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Glenys Ker is a highly experienced work-based learning and professional practice facilitator and assessor, drawing on an extensive and highly successful background as a teacher and career practitioner at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in both university and polytechnic settings. She is also an active researcher in the field of work-based learning, integrating her research into the development of facilitators of independent learning.

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John is a published researcher and accomplished jazz musician who integrates reflective and relational pedagogy in his facilitation and artistic work. His current Master of Professional Practice inquiry explores learner identity, facilitation, and transformation within Capable NZ's Independent Learning Pathway (ILP).

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TRANSLATING A CAMPUS-BASED PROGRAMME TO A WORK-AUGMENTED DEGREE: THE EVOLUTION OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY EDUCATION

Ema Tokolahi, Hana Cadzow, Rita Robinson and James Mackay

INTRODUCTION

This discussion document explores the evolution of occupational therapy degree level education from a traditional campus-based programme towards a work augmented model of delivery. This model was designed to address workforce shortages and enhance accessibility in rural and remote Aotearoa. Degree-level apprenticeships present an exciting opportunity to address workforce shortages by stimulating sector growth; promote social and workplace mobility for marginalised and underrepresented groups of students (Mackay et al., 2024), and provide a way for individuals to gain both academic and practical training while earning a salary and remaining in their community. This increases access to study for diverse populations and allows communities to 'grow their own' practitioners to address workforce shortages. By combining classroom learning with on-the-job experience, degree-level apprenticeships offer a unique and valuable approach to education that can help bridge the skills gap in a range of industries. This creates a pipeline of skilled workers who have already been trained in their particular industry and are motivated to continue living and working in the area (where there are documented workforce shortages), as well as creating a more efficient and cost-effective way to meet workforce needs.

Internationally, degree-level apprenticeships have been established as an alternative route to traditional university study, which may not be accessible or desirable for everyone, and allow apprentices to develop skills that are directly relevant to their chosen career path (Cushen-Brewster et al., 2022). In Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter, Aotearoa) degree-level apprenticeships are a new addition to the tertiary education landscape (Andalo, 2019; University of Wolverhampton, 2022), with only one existing at the time of publication (the Bachelor of Engineering Technology through Otago Polytechnic). In 2022, Otago Polytechnic, in collaboration with NorthTec, explored the feasibility of developing a degree-level apprenticeship model of delivery for the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy qualification in the remote and rural north of Aotearoa. Designing a program for the Aotearoa context demands attention be paid to Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and the opportunity for apprenticeships to address inequity and elevate outcomes for Māori. Outcomes might be: educational, by delivering higher education via a more accessible model; economic, by building the workforce; and health-related, by increasing the health workforce in lesser served areas.

All authors of this article are educators involved in the feasibility and development of the new model of delivery for the Bachelor in Occupational Therapy program. The scoping reviews that informed this piece were undertaken to advance our understanding of other tertiary education providers' experiences of developing and implementing degree-level apprenticeships elsewhere, in order to inform the planning and implementation of the new model of delivery for the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy programme. (The findings of these scoping reviews will be reported elsewhere.) In response to, and as a byproduct of, interrogating the literature, the teams from Otago

Polytechnic and NorthTec engaged in continually evolving discussions about how to describe and define the model being developed. This article articulates key reflections from those discussions and clarifies the resulting conclusions.

APPRENTICESHIP CONTINUUM

On reviewing the literature, a wide variety of models and programmes, with varying pedagogies, were found to exist under the broad umbrella term "degree apprenticeships." In the UK, a review of apprenticeships similarly concluded that understandings of what constitutes an apprenticeship have broadened from the original concept of a learner being apprenticed to an employer, to the extent that often the employer is no longer central to the teaching and learning experience (Richard, 2012). Subsequently, our labelling of the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program evolved from a degree-level apprenticeship to a work-augmented degree program. These terms are defined below. In this article, we differentiate the key features of learning and workplace experiences along a proposed continuum, and outline the rationale for the shift in how the new model of delivery for the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program was defined. The proposed apprenticeship continuum starts from traditional degree apprenticeships (TDA), progresses through work integrated learning (WIL)/work-based learning (WBL), and culminates in what we have defined as work-augmented learning (WAL).

Figure 1: Illustration of proposed degree apprenticeship continuum.

Traditional degree apprenticeship

Traditional degree apprenticeships are defined in the literature as formalised, structured programmes that combine academic study, towards a bachelor's qualification, with practical on-the-job training and paid work experience, and the two elements of work and academia are integral and co-dependent (Angot et al., 2008; Irons, 2017; Kirby, 2015; Waller-Davies, 2014). The apprentice, as a "novice to the skills required" in their profession (Kirby, 2015, p. 4), requires substantial training in theoretical and practical skills from a "master" (Crawford-Lee, 2016, p. 330). The purpose is to prepare apprentices for careers, rather than specific jobs, by enabling them to earn their qualification and develop transferable skills (Belgutay, 2017). In the TDAs reviewed, the typical division of time over a week might be three days in a workplace and two study days (Angot et al., 2008) and both elements are sustained for the duration of the programme, often 3 to 4 years (Kirby, 2015). Collaboration with industry during development was evident in several apprenticeships reviewed, which were co-designed by employers, educational institutions, and professional bodies, to ensure they met the needs of the industry (Felce, 2017; King et al., 2016).

TDAs are therefore positioned at one end of the continuum that represents a foundational level of workplace learning, where learning occurs primarily through hands-on task performance in the workplace. Skill acquisition is achieved by the apprentice through repetitive practice and gradual mastery under the guidance of skilled mentor. Progression is systematic and competency is determined by the practical demonstration of skills within the workplace environment.

Work-integrated learning / Work-based learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a pedagogical approach that brings work experiences and academic learning closer together through the use of simulated work environments (King et al., 2016; Penman et al., 2023), work placements, work projects, and applied research in collaboration with industry (King et al., 2016). WIL is embedded in most allied health programmes, though there is a high degree of variation in how it is described, and the factors influencing this include: the location and context of the WIL, the nature of the work activities being performed, and the focus on the learning that occurs (Penman et al., 2023). Allied health regulatory bodies each have their own accreditation standards that stipulate the length, hours, contexts and supervisor models required for placements (Penman et al., 2023). Placement experiences and academic learning occur in distinctly different environments through a WIL approach.

Work-based learning (WBL) has been defined as the process of acquiring knowledge and skills through implementing and reflecting on tasks in their real-world contexts; in other words, the workplace (Lucas et al., 2012), or "learning for work, at work and through work" (Hamilton, 2021, p. 2). WBL "deliberately merges theory with practice" and acknowledges the intersection between these modes of learning, and emphasises reflection in learning (Raelin, 2010, p. 39). Recognising and valuing the differences between academic and workplace learning is fundamental to WBL pedagogy (Hamilton, 2021; King et al., 2016), along with a means of ensuring graduates are successful in the workplace (Somerville & Dziallas, 2022). In a WBL approach, the learner is primarily based in the workplace, accessing academic learning in a structured and supportive manner to enhance and develop their workplace skills and experiences.

WBL programmes are often promoted as a solution to the lack of diversity in the workforce and a means by which to attract and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their career prospects (Bentley-Gockman, 2020). Learners from WBL programmes may be considered more appealing to employers as they are able to "hit the ground running" (Hamilton, 2021). However, the risk of work-based learning programmes perpetuating or increasing educational inequities has also been raised. Reilly (2014) found the students most likely to experience ongoing advantages from work-based learning programmes were those at selective colleges, in larger cities and with a focus on academic and applied science majors, which were generally attended by more privileged students in the first place.

Work-based learning (WBL) and work-integrated learning (WIL) models are differentiated in some of the literature and at other times were used interchangeably. All models were considered pivotal in producing graduates who are "work ready" (Konstantinou & Miller, 2020). Both models were consistently associated with apprenticeship programmes as the pedagogical approach to how learning occurrs is similar.

WIL/WBL are positioned midway on the continuum and represent a more balanced integration of academic learning into workplace experiences, with significant academic learning happening in conjunction with and deliberately connected to relevant tasks undertaken in the workplace. In this context, workplace tasks serve the dual purposes of contributing to job performance and forming the basis of academic assessment. Academic learning informs and enhances the workplace performance and assessment encompasses both academic understanding and practice application.

Work-augmented learning

A new term, work-augmented learning (WAL), is proposed here to represent the delivery of programmes primarily through academic content, positioning this style of delivery at the opposite end of the continuum to TDAs. Concurrent workplace experiences serve to enhance and contextualise academic learning, which incorporates relevant workplace scenarios and challenges; acknowledging that learners are not always under the supervision of a master in their field. Workplace tasks are not directly prescribed or assessed and there is an emphasis on rapidly

embodying academic concepts in daily practice and embedding learning into real-world contexts. Assessment is primarily through academic means, with workplace experiences providing supporting evidence of understanding and application. While WAL is a more academically focused model, it still maintains a strong connection to real-world application, which justifies its alignment with apprenticeship degree programmes.

PROPOSED MODEL OF WORK-AUGMENTED LEARNING DELIVERY

The proposed model of delivery for the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy work-augmented programme will integrate six key elements: workplace experience, campus-based teaching, noho marae wānanga, teleconferences, self-directed study, and fieldwork. The programme document, approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), will be the same as for the campus-based programme, currently being delivered by Otago Polytechnic through two other campuses (in Ōtepoti and Kirikiriroa). Each element of the delivery is described below.

Workplace experience

Learners will be engaged in a minimum of 15 hours work (paid or voluntary) each week in an area of relevance to occupational therapy. In this model, work and study remain distinct and separate: the usual employer/management relationships remain and the employer remains responsible for the employee's supervision and practice when working; the tertiary institution remains responsible for the teaching and assessment of theory and practical skills. Not all learners will be employed in a workplace with a registered occupational therapist, so direct professional supervision from an occupational therapist cannot be guaranteed. The implications of this are that it may limit the scope of profession-specific tasks the learner can practice and perform during their workplace experiences and work time cannot count towards their fieldwork hours. Experiences in the workplace will provide a context to apply theoretical learning to and examples of practice to reflect on during learning. Until learners graduate, they will not be able to practice occupational therapy per se in the workplace, though it is anticipated there will be positive influences on professionalism, knowledge, confidence, and social-interaction skills.

Campus-based day

Campus-based teaching and learning will occur face-to-face one day a week. The academic year has been extended to 36 weeks, rather than the usual 32 weeks, to accommodate a more balanced spread of academic content with time in employment over the year. Lecturers, with relevant expertise, will live-stream into the classroom where a learning facilitator will be present to support the learners. Interactive activities, chosen to be in alignment with the maramataka and course content, will be used to enable observation and the practice of skills that can be integrated with theory being learned and linked to reflections from workplace experiences. Sometimes assessments will occur during the campus-based day and whānau and local services may be invited to observe and participate, enhancing connections with the wider community. When necessary, hands-on teaching of practical skills will be integrated into the noho marae wānanga with the lecturer present in person.

Noho marae wānanga

Noho marae wānanga will be distributed throughout the programme, over weekends: four times in the first year, and twice each in the second and third years. Noho marae wānanga will incorporate opportunities to expand and deepen mātauranga Māori knowledge and to engage in skills-based workshops with lecturers.

Teleconferences

Teleconferences will be held weekly, in the evening, with learners able to join from home. Content will vary week-by-week and will involve lecturers sharing information or activities to consolidate content; guest speakers (usually

occupational therapists) sharing their experiences in practice; group discussions and reflections, often making connections between the learners learning and workplace experience; group supervision sessions; peer-to-peer teaching, and learner presentations.

Self-directed learning

Self-directed activities and reading will be accessible via Moodle, the online learning platform used by Otago Polytechnic. Activities will include readings, videos, voice-over PowerPoint presentations, quizzes, and other interactive learning activities. The learning platform will incorporate text-based forums for learners and lecturers to engage in meaningful conversations about the learning and assessments.

Fieldwork

The Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand and World Federation of Occupational Therapists require learners to undertake a minimum of 1,000 hours fieldwork experience during the programme. During fieldwork, learners are placed in a service to practice their knowledge and skills, under the direct supervision of a registered occupational therapist, as is typical of a WIL model of delivery. Three of the placements are in blocks: four weeks in the first year, and eight weeks in the second and third years. Many learners will travel outside the region for the duration of these block placements though there will be some local placements for those who are not able to travel away from home for extended periods. Another two fieldwork placements are integrated into the time allocated to their campus-based day and may be at the learner's place of employment or another service locally (determined on a case-by-case basis). These placements are focused more on developing soft skills (under the supervision of a registered occupational therapist to ensure links are made to professional competencies) and completing a community project for an organisation.

DISTINGUISHING WORK-AUGMENTED LEARNING

As illustrated by the proposed occupational therapy degree programme model of delivery, key features of WAL that are consistent with other models on the apprenticeship continuum are: interdependence of workplace experiences and academic study; preparing learners for careers and not specific jobs; emphasis on reflective practice, and ongoing industry collaboration. There are also key features of the WAL model that distinguish it from the other models of delivery, as exemplified in this occupational therapy degree programme. Differences include: the model of supervision of learners; the tripartite agreement structure, and workplace task integration and assessment.

Interdependence of work and study

In the proposed occupational therapy degree programme, learners will be required to be in employment, or a volunteer role, in a practice setting that is relevant to their learning. For this programme, appropriate employment options will include roles as occupational therapy assistants, rehabilitation assistants, carers, fitness instructors, teacher aides, cultural advisors in health and social care settings, and health care workers. This ensures learners have relevant workplace experiences they can use to contextualise the learning in their academic study; and, in this way, the two elements are interdependent.

Preparing for a career

To achieve accreditation, all occupational therapy programmes must deliver a curriculum that produces graduates able to work across a range of sectors. In this programme, learners will be exposed to a range of practice contexts, sectors and practices, through their academic study, teleconferences with occupational therapists, and fieldwork placements, which will extend beyond their current work role. This will result in the learner acquiring generic and transferable skills that are not job specific.

Emphasis on reflective practice

Across all models on the apprenticeship continuum, emphasis is placed on how learners reflect on their workplace experiences and make the connections between theory and practice. Reflection on both workplace and academic experiences is valued, and both are acknowledged in the learner's journey.

Industry collaboration

Varying degrees of collaboration are evident across the apprenticeship spectrum, from curricula being customised by industry, with proactive collaboration in the recruitment and training of learners (Felce, 2017; Powell & Walsh, 2018) to having learning objectives and agreements negotiated (and assessed) between the learner, the tertiary institution, and the employer (Hughes & Saieva, 2019; Lillis & Bravenboer, 2020) and industry reference groups (Bradley et al., 2019; Lillis & Bravenboer, 2020).

Supervision of learners

Shortages in the workforce in the delivery region are so significant that there would not be sufficient practitioners or workplace settings available to allow all learners to be paired with a registered occupational therapist. While the workplace setting must be relevant, the presence of an occupational therapist in the same organisation cannot be guaranteed; consequently, the level of on-the-job training and supervision may vary significantly.

Tripartite agreement structure

As with other models, a tripartite agreement will be in place between employers, tertiary educators, and learners. The tripartite agreement will clearly delineate the roles and expectations of each party. Unlike other models, in the WAL model employers will not be responsible for the assessment or teaching of workplace tasks or content relevant to the learner's curriculum. Similarly, educators are not tasked with supervising learners' workplace practices and cannot prescribe workplace activities that must be conducted. Therefore, workplace supervision remains under the purview of workplace supervisors and tertiary educators retain academic oversight. This structure maintains clear boundaries as necessary for managing legal, insurance, and clinical responsibilities.

Workplace task integration and assessment

As previously noted, specific workplace tasks cannot be dictated by the tertiary institution during work hours under the WAL model. Subsequently, WAL does not include formal assessment of workplace activities that contribute to learners' academic progression. Instead, learning and assessment is structured to draw in learner experiences and reflections from workplace contexts, as opposed to specific tasks or functions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AOTEAROA

This discussion document has introduced the concept of WAL as a delivery model for a degree level apprenticeship. The unique context of delivering the WAL model in Aotearoa has implications for addressing inequities and elevating educational, economic, and health outcomes for Māori, which will enhance outcomes for all of Aotearoa.

While initially set to be delivered in Te Tai Tokerau, the WAL model can be expanded to provide delivery nationally across a range of rural and remote locations, further enhancing accessibility to career progression opportunities for learners interested in training to become occupational therapists. This can serve to address nationwide workforce shortages, particularly in such rural and remote areas that have longstanding challenges with recruiting into the health workforce (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, 2024).

Increasing workforce diversity is a key priority for the occupational therapy profession and for the region (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, 2024). Degree-level apprenticeships can promote social and workplace mobility for marginalised and underrepresented groups, providing a way for learners to access academic and practical training while still earning a salary. This has the potential for enhancing learner diversity and, therefore, diversity in the workforce.

CONCLUSION

By not constraining the programme to the requirements of a traditional apprenticeship or WIL/WBL model, the WAL model allows for innovation and creativity in meeting the unique needs of the health workforce in rural and remote Aotearoa. Adopting the WAL model enables the occupational therapy degree programme to maintain the benefits of workplace integration while adapting to the specific challenges and requirements of the profession and the region, with its limited professional resources.

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FROM CLASSROOM TO CONSTRUCTION SITE: THE ROLE OF MIXED MODE LEARNING IN ENGINEERING WORKFORCE PREPARATION

Tiju Mathew Thomas

INTRODUCTION

A major barrier to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) participation is the early disengagement of students in science and mathematics, leading to an underprepared workforce (Sanders, 2008). A critical challenge for tertiary institutions is bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world applications. Engineering students often struggle to apply theoretical concepts to industry-relevant scenarios, necessitating a shift toward authentic learning models (Reeves et al., 2005). Recent reports and literature continue to highlight the increasing demand for skilled engineering graduates in New Zealand. The Hays 2025 Skills Report indicates that 85 percent of hiring managers encounter gaps in skills during the hiring process which affect performance, while 86 percent recognise that the professional skills required of graduates are evolving over time (Hays, 2025). Similarly, the ACE New Zealand and Consulting Surveyors New Zealand Members Remuneration Survey found that 80 percent of member organisations reported vacancies for professional engineers, averaging 5.5 unfilled positions per firm, while 66 percent faced shortages in graduate engineer roles (ACE New Zealand, 2024). These findings underscore not only a skills gap but also the urgent need to support learners from being students to becoming engineering professionals.

The engineering profession remains among the most in-demand fields in New Zealand. To thrive in an evolving technological landscape, engineering graduates must develop critical thinking, applied knowledge, and interdisciplinary competencies (Savage et al., 2011). Despite high demand, engineering attrition rates remain high, prompting research into the factors influencing student retention and success (Engineering New Zealand, 2025; Makgoba, 2010; Makina, 2010; Zhong et al., 2022). According to Engineers Australia (2023), New Zealand's engineering sector experiences lower attrition rates compared to other industries; however, the limited number of new graduates entering the field remains a concern. The report highlights that only 73 percent of engineering graduates pursue careers in the profession, underscoring the need for stronger retention strategies and workforce planning (Engineers Australia, 2023). Studies emphasise the need for contextual, interdisciplinary, and problem-driven learning to enhance engagement, and performance amongst students (Brown et al., 1989; Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Kleine et al, 2024; McLellan, 1996). Contextual and meaningful learning experiences underscore the development of a professional identity, fostering motivation, deeper understanding, and the ability to tackle real-world engineering challenges (Strobel et al., 2013).

Among the competencies required of engineers, critical thinking is considered of paramount significance (Cooney et al., 2008). To cultivate these skills, tertiary education must integrate structured learning models that blend theory with hands-on practical experience (Jackson & Wilton, 2024; Jenkins et al., 2019). Without this alignment, graduates are at risk of inhibiting their cross-disciplinary problem-solving skills.

A collaborative approach between academia and industry is crucial to address the skills shortage (The Academic Insights, 2024; Vummidi, 2025). Cadetship programmes, which integrate work-based learning with classroom education, are a promising strategy to enhance employability and practical expertise (Engineering e2e, n.d.). Such programmes not only support skills development but also foster the transition in identity from student to professional. These programmes provide students with financial incentives, mentorship, career progressions, and exposure to industry practices, bridging the divides between academic knowledge, relevant work experience, and workplace competency. A targeted approach and early interventions at the school level and industry-driven curriculum design can make engineering education relevant, meaningful, and engaging (Herrington et al., 2014; Treacy & O'Donoghue, 2014).

Recent research emphasises that the development of professional identity is a critical outcome of work-integrated and vocational education (Raelin, 2016; Trede et al., 2012). Learners not only acquire skills but undergo a transformation in how they see themselves in relation to the profession (Trede et al., 2012). Especially in engineering education, structured and planned workplace exposure has been found to accelerate the shift from learner identity to professional identity (Raelin, 2016).

This study positions cadetship and flexible learning models such as the mixed mode model to achieve identity transformation. This article explores how the mixed mode delivery model not only supports workforce readiness, but also professional identity development among learners. By examining student learning experiences and graduate survey data (2016–2021), this study assesses the effectiveness of this model's approach and its alignment with the needs of the industry. The insights gained from this study contribute to the ongoing discourse on engineering education reform and workforce development in New Zealand.

A BACKGROUND TO CADETSHIP PROGRAMMES IN NEW ZEALAND

Cadetship programmes provide school leavers and working professionals an opportunity to earn while studying part time, combining full-time employment with structured learning (Engineering and e2e, n.d.). Employers support cadets through diploma or degree qualifications, ensuring relevant training aligned to the industry. The Public Works Department initiated the first civil engineering cadetship in 1894, but the scheme declined in the late 1980s (WSP, n.d.). By the early 2000s, WSP-Opus had revived their cadetship programmes to address a shortage in engineering technicians and technologists in New Zealand.

Engineering technician graduates are trained to handle well-defined engineering problems, as opposed to technologists, who engage with broadly defined engineering problems (Engineering New Zealand, 2017). Engineering New Zealand (2017) categorises well-defined problems as those with systematic solutions, limited theoretical complexity, and well-defined adherence to industry standards with less complexity to address. These problems involve localised consequences, minimal conflicting constraints, and practical knowledge application, making them highly relevant to engineering cadetship programmes at a technician level. Well-defined engineering problems often align with standardised codes of practice and specifications, and workplace safety protocols, requiring technicians to apply technical expertise within controlled, industry-specific approved environments (Engineering Council, 2020). This structured approach ensures that graduates transition smoothly into the workforce, developing practical problem-solving abilities while working within clearly established professional guidelines.

Over the last 20 years, cadetship programmes have emerged as a structured pathway into the engineering workforce, bridging higher education with industry needs. By integrating the engineering technician level body of knowledge, hands-on learning, and industry mentorship, these programmes have enhanced workplace readiness, providing cadets with progressive career development opportunities while mitigating New Zealand's engineering skill shortage within the civil engineering construction sector.

CADETSHIP PROGRAMMES AS AUTHENTIC INTEGRATED LEARNING

Cadetship programmes provide an integrated learning pathway that bridges classroom learning with industry needs, equipping students with practical engineering skills as they earn a qualification while working. In New Zealand, these programs cater to individuals with National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 qualifications, particularly those with mathematics and science subjects, who seek to gain engineering credentials while working on real-world construction projects (Engineering e2e, n.d.). A study by Cameron and Devitt (2016) indicates that students are most successful in cadetships when they are motivated, inquisitive, and willing to engage in independent research. Engineering is inherently connected to solving authentic problems in real-world engineering contexts (Strobel et al., 2013), and cadetship programmes underpin this by ensuring that knowledge provided is directly related and applied in engineering settings. This connection between academic learning and real-world application enhances motivation, engagement, and problem-solving abilities (Fouts, 2000).

Authentic learning environments, where students see the relevance of their academic learning in real-world applications, are essential for developing workforce-ready graduates (Treacy & O'Donoghue, 2014). Herrington et al. (2014) suggest that future pedagogical models must be built on authentic learning settings. However, researchers have identified challenges in presenting students with real-world authentic tasks (Barab et al., 2000; Gulikers et al., 2005; Petraglia, 1998). Herrington, Oliver, and Reeves (2002) emphasise that it is important for students to perceive the learning as meaningful for its authenticity to be effective. Cadetship programmes naturally address this issue by allowing students to engage in industry-based learning early on, ensuring their training in academic settings is relevant, applied, and practical.

THE QUALIFICATION

The New Zealand Diploma in Engineering (NZDE) is a two-year, full-time programme (16 courses, 240 credits) at Level 6 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. Students can specialise in Civil, Electrical, or Mechanical Engineering. The NZDE was developed in response to industry demand for a technician-level qualification that integrates practical skills with high-quality academic study aligned with national standards (NZDE, n.d., para 1). It is to be noted that graduates of the NZDE do not attain Chartered Professional Engineer status; the qualification is accredited for the graduate to have a professional identity appropriate to the role of engineering technician, which is formally recognised within New Zealand's engineering competency framework (Engineering New Zealand, 2017). The qualification ensures that graduates are equipped with applied engineering knowledge and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for workforce readiness.

The New Zealand Board of Engineering Diplomas (NZBED) oversees the NZDE to ensure its continued alignment with industry requirements. A key focus of the qualification is to provide students with both theoretical knowledge and hands-on learning opportunities that mirror real engineering workplace opportunities. Recognising the need for flexible education pathways, the industry and academic institutions have collaborated to make the qualification accessible to working professionals. The mixed mode delivery model, which will be discussed in the next section, has addressed this challenge by blending face-to-face learning with distance education, supporting engineering skillset development while accommodating workplace commitments.

THE MIXED MODE DELIVERY MODEL

Throughout this paper, the term "mixed mode delivery model" refers to a structured part-time study model built around intensive "study blocks." This teaching model implements a distance learning approach for delivering the New Zealand Diploma in Engineering (NZDE) through a structured study block format. The academic year consists of two semesters, each spanning approximately 18–20 weeks. Each semester is divided into two intense study blocks per course, each lasting two-and-a-half to three days, during which all face-to-face course content

is delivered. Apart from these two face-to-face blocks, the remainder of the semester is dedicated to self-directed student study time, assessment work, and any engagement through online modes. These blocks are strategically scheduled to accommodate the requirements of each course, including teaching hours, practical lab work, assessments, and tutorial hours, ensuring an optimal learning experience for students who are unable to attend conventional full-time programmes in their local region.

To facilitate a seamless learning process, all course content and resources are provided in advance. A gap of four to five weeks is typically allowed for between study blocks to engage students in self-directed learning, facilitating the reinforcement of their understanding of the previously taught course materials. Open-book assignments are completed independently outside block teaching hours, while closed-book assessments are conducted during the second or final study block. Tutors assess, mark, and provide feedback through an online platform, allowing students to track their progress and strategise their learning.

The programme is delivered at multiple venues across the country, enabling students to enrol and attend courses at a location convenient to them. This format allows part-time students to complete the NZDE qualification within five to six years. A final examination is held at the end of each semester at designated venues across New Zealand, ensuring all students can attend the nearest venue. The mixed mode delivery model is particularly beneficial for industry professionals, as it minimises time away from work, typically requiring only five days per semester for a single course. The expectation is that students engage in self-directed study outside the structured study blocks, supported by comprehensive course materials, resources, and tutor support offered to guide independent learning. It is worth noting that similar block models have existed for decades in jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and South Africa, where apprenticeship pathways for technicians have traditionally combined structured work experience with part-time study (Trevelyan, 2012). However, adopting this delivery of the NZDE qualification through the integration of study blocks and cadetship offers a modern adaptation of this model particularly suited to New Zealand's civil engineering sector.

This paper examines the effectiveness of the mixed mode delivery model in preparing graduates for the civil engineering workforce, exploring its impact on student learning, industry engagement, and professional readiness.

METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on secondary data analysis; specifically graduate survey responses collected between the period of 2016–2021. These surveys were administered online to graduates who had completed the programme requirements. The surveys consisted of structured multiple-choice questions with provisions for collecting open-ended responses to capture deeper insights. While the survey was not originally developed for this study, its standardised format ensures consistency in data collection throughout the period of 2016–2021. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the Western Institute of Technology.

The quantitative data from multiple-choice responses were coded and visualised using descriptive statistics, allowing for pattern identification to understand graduates' experiences. The qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, which involves six key phases: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. The thematic analysis focused on semantic themes, ensuring the analysis remained within the explicit meanings of the gathered responses rather than interpreting underlying assumptions.

A key limitation of this study is that the findings are reported purely based on a single data source, the survey response, without triangulation from additional qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups. This limitation is acknowledged and was mitigated by the inclusion of open-ended questions in the survey, which allowed respondents to provide detailed reflections, offering a more reflective understanding of their learning experience. The surveys also included optional comment sections, enabling graduates to elaborate on their responses, thereby enhancing the depth of qualitative insights.

The study aims to critique and evaluate the effectiveness of the mixed mode delivery model, particularly investigating how the model bridges the gap between academia and industry needs. By analysing graduate responses, the paper highlights the model's strengths, areas for improvement, and its potential scalability for broader industry application.

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEYS

Graduate survey data from 2016–2021 reflects consistently strong alignment between the New Zealand Diploma in Engineering (NZDE) programme and the academic process of preparing learners for the engineering workforce. The majority of graduates were employed in engineering-related roles at the time of graduation, with many graduates already holding mid- to senior level positions within the civil engineering industry while studying. This real-time alignment of work and academic learning was considered a powerful catalyst in their professional growth and academic development, highlighting the NZDE qualification as a formative experience in becoming workforce ready at a technician level.

It is interesting to note that the central theme emerging across the surveys was the integration of classroom theory and industrial practice. Many graduates emphasised how the block course or the mixed mode delivery format allowed them to immediately apply engineering concepts at their workplace. As one graduate from 2017 survey noted, "Related to my work, [I] could see the application of what I was learning. To free up time after work, [I] can now go home and relax instead of study." Another graduate from 2020 wrote of "the benefit of the information and putting it into practice at work," referring to the part-time nature of the block courses. Another respondent from 2021 survey noted: "Very practical and relatable to my job." This direct connection between learning and doing not only improves comprehension, but also builds confidence, technical fluency with direct application, and workplace identity.

The motivational drivers for completing the qualification consistently pointed to personal and professional transformation. Many respondents undertook and completed the qualification as a means of gaining industrial credibility, advance opportunities, and personal growth. For example, they made statements like "completing my study to gain better employment and become a more desirable employee." Another graduate noted:

> One key driver has been the potential progression within Downer once I have completed the NZDE (Civil). Another driver has been my employer covering the cost of my studies so I can focus more on my papers and the time management involved with the studies. (2017 graduate survey)

These statements reflect a clear appreciation of the professional trajectory the qualification offers. Another respondent from the 2021 graduate survey said their motivations were the "increase in potential earnings over [my] career and increase[d] likelihood of employment." These comments clearly demonstrate that the students had a clear understanding of the value of the diploma as a stepping stone in their engineering identity.

A significant number of graduates highlighted the role of the employer in supporting their academic journey. Many graduates were engineering cadets or sponsored by their employers receiving financial support, study leave, and workplace mentoring. These provisions provided more than convenience: they modelled the collaborative, supportive environments graduates will continue to experience in professional practice. Employer engagement assisted not only in validating their learning experience, but embedded them within the work culture and expectations of the industry.

The flexibility and accessibility the mixed mode delivery model offered emerged as another crucial factor in qualification completion and developing workforce readiness. Respondents appreciated the opportunity to study part time while working full time. The ability to compartmentalise learning into focused blocks allowed students to spend less time attending classes and to remain productive in their professional roles while progressing towards

the qualification. One graduate from 2020 shared, "Block courses worked well for me. To the point, no fluffing around." Another graduate from 2018 noted: "Block courses, I prefer that format to full time study. This also allows the compartmentalisation of the work which makes it easier to learn."

Other graduates highlighted the accessibility of regional delivery centres, well-prepared course materials, and assessments that better reflected industrial practices and professional engineering practices.

While the feedback was mostly positive, some offered areas for improvement, particularly around the relevance of the curriculum. A few respondents noted misalignment between a particular course's theoretical components and industrial practice, pointing to outdated technologies, excessive focus on rote learning, and limited attention to soft skills like relationship management and planning embedded within the programme. One graduate remarked, "There is too much focus on outdated materials … and not enough on real-world case studies or construction methodologies." Another 2019 graduate noted: "Unfortunately most of the course didn't cater well for engineering consulting type material … you could get more students from this part of the industry if you changed a few things up." These comments suggest that while the NZDE prepares learners for many technical tasks, broader professional competencies could be further strengthened through the programme and reflected in the course content.

The graduate survey data reinforces the programme's effectiveness in building key engineering attributes. High percentages of respondents rated themselves as well-prepared to apply engineering theory, to perform technical operations, and work within teams to perform core competencies expected of engineering technicians. Additionally, responses to open-ended questions frequently referenced increased confidence, self-directed learning, and the ability to problem-solve in workplace environments, all indicators that respondents were developing necessary skills and attributes expected of graduates of the NZDE qualification.

The surveys also demonstrated that many learners improved in their ability to critically reflect, a key skill underpinning the transition from students to experienced practitioners. Several graduates commented on the self-discipline and motivation required by the block course's structure and the self-efficacy involved in completing the qualification while balancing full-time work and family commitments. As one 2021 graduate noted, "What kept me focused was the opportunities that would open to me once I qualified, and my genuine interest in what I was learning." Another respondent noted, "Striving for constant personal growth and improvement. Salary improvement." This shows a developing sense of personal growth, purposeful engagement, and identity within the engineering field.

Finally, in answer to the question "would you recommend studying the NZDE with [the provider]", the recommendation rate was consistently over 80 percent, suggesting a strong perception of value amongst the graduates and industry. Their willingness to recommend the qualification through the mixed mode delivery model reflects both satisfaction with the programme's outcomes and the delivery model, as well as a belief in its transformative potential for other learners on similar academic journeys.

In conclusion, the survey data reveals that the NZDE programme delivered through the mixed mode delivery model supports learners not just in retaining employment, but in becoming engineers, through authentic learning, industry integration, self-motivation, and reflective practices. The qualification acts as a bridge between academia and the evolving expectations of the engineering profession, helping learners to navigate this transition with confidence.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study align with both interpretive and critical theory paradigms. The interpretive paradigm, as described by Sarantakos (2005), focuses on the "views, opinions, and perceptions of people as they are experienced and expressed by everyday life" (p. 40). In this research, graduates articulate their subjective experiences with the mixed mode delivery model and academic learning, providing insights into their learning journey accumulated over a period of five to seven years. Meanwhile, the critical paradigm allows for a reflective critique of the current educational practices, assessing the effectiveness of the mixed mode delivery model in preparing industry graduates for workforce readiness.

The mixed mode delivery model was established to support engineering cadets in full-time employment by offering a flexible, part-time learning option. Graduate survey data from 2016–2021 confirms that most students were employed in the relevant industry while studying and found this structure highly effective in helping them relate fieldwork and workplace practices with academic learning. Many students were positive about the learning experience and expressed how it was relevant to their role, allowing them to apply acquired knowledge directly at their workplace.

According to Reeves, Herrington, and Oliver (2005), authentic learning situates educational tasks in real-world contexts, which increases motivation and enhances learning. Reddy and Bruyns (2016) and Strobel et al. (2013) agree that students are more likely to succeed when their learning is authentic, meaningful and mirrors real practice. In this context, cadetship experiences not only enhance technical competence but also progressively shape students' professional engineering roles. Given that cadets often work on multidisciplinary engineering problems at their workplace (Petroski, 1996), aligning academic education with industrial practices is essential to sustain motivation.

Support from employers was another significant influence on student success. Graduates frequently identified such support, which included financial, logistical, and motivational assistance, as a reason for pursuing and completing their academic journey. These findings support Tahir et al. (2014), who emphasise the role of training employees in enhancing both personal and organisational performance. Supporting employees to pursue academic qualifications and training facilitates career progression and builds workforce capability. Many respondents viewed the NZDE programme not as an end point, but as a pathway to a better life, promotions and increased responsibility, and more substantial contributions to their employers. Encouragement from employers further strengthens the learner's sense of belonging within the professional community to create a professional identity.

Tutors have a critical role within the mixed mode delivery model. Graduates valued qualified and knowledgeable tutors, particularly those with on-the-ground experience with projects. Vansteenkiste et al. (2004) underscore the importance of educators framing and presenting learning tasks, which strongly influences learner motivation. Done and Willmot (2015) found that students who could apply their learning in real contexts before graduation were more motivated to enter the workforce and retained applied concepts better. This was echoed by graduates in the survey who appreciated the practical engagement, contextualisation of learning, and real engineering examples delivered by practicing professionals. Institutions should prioritise recruiting tutors who can bring relevant field experience into the classroom.

The model's success also relies on a robust academic support ecosystem within the tertiary education provider. Survey respondents praised the quality of academic and administrative support they received throughout their study period, noting that it extended beyond course content to include timely feedback, tutor availability, and employer engagement. This aligns with Tinto's (1975) theory that academic integration and support increase the likelihood of persistence, and with Thomas (2012), who stresses fostering the feeling of belonging and engagement to improve student retention.

In conclusion, the mixed mode delivery model not only helps full-time employees complete a qualification through a part-time format, but more importantly, contributes to the learner's becoming workforce ready.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This article makes a few recommendations, designed to strengthen pathways of professional transformation, ensuring that learners not only complete qualifications but also transition effectively into confident, work-ready, and holistic engineering professionals. Firstly, providers should utilise existing staff with local experience from the industry for cadetship schemes and to actively support the needs of part-time learners from the industry. A structured approach to delivering the qualification to part-time learners should be considered, along with the motivational factors (as perceived by the learners in this study) including their integration into the academic life through active learning and case-based and meaningful educational experiences. Engaging learners from the industry could inspire them to work through hands-on learning with frequent opportunities to put engineering theory into practice. While their cadets are learning knowledge and skills in an academic setting, employers could complement this with training in specific skills or processes required in their relevant industry. Further, engaging with established international models such as UK and European apprenticeship frameworks could offer valuable insights into how similar programmes achieve stronger alignment, shorter durations, or broader mobility of graduates. This benchmarking activity would enable the refinement of the New Zealand model in ways that maintain its flexibility while lifting its responsiveness to the engineering industry needs.

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SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH EMERGING ENGLISH LITERACY: "FIND A ROLE THAT GIVES EACH LEARNER MANA AND CONSTANTLY ENCOURAGE THEM"

Celine Kearney

INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand government closed the country's borders in late March 2020 to all except returning New Zealand citizens and residents as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Radio New Zealand, 2020). Borders opened again in stages from late February 2022 (Te Kawanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government, 2022). Over time, this caused cohorts in English language programmes in New Zealand tertiary institutions to become predominantly composed of local learners, of migrant and former refugee backgrounds. This was a change from the large cohorts of international students of pre-COVID years. English language teachers then faced the challenge of developing their skills to adapt to this new learner group.

This was also my challenge then, as my student group changed to predominantly local learners with varied social and educational backgrounds and learning needs. Some were not literate in their own language. I needed to learn to respond to their varied learning needs. As a late-career teacher, this challenge became an opportunity for professional growth and "becoming," and for this research. This project began in 2021 focusing on teachers' experiences of teaching adult English language learners from migrant and former refugee backgrounds, some of whom might not be literate in their first language(s). It aimed to assist other teachers of this learner group and to contribute to teacher education. In the process of analysing interview transcripts from eight teachers of this learner group around New Zealand, and the resulting emerging themes, I understood that a sole classroom or teacher focus was insufficient to support the complexity of the needs of teachers of this group of learners. Therefore, my focus widened to engage with community-based organisations which support these learners beyond the classroom through a variety of social, cultural, and educational programmes. The original grounded theory methodology was also widened to encompass transdisciplinary theory and insights to try to explain the complexity of the context and the challenges for teachers.

This inquiry foregrounds the experiences and professional insights of teachers and a member of a community-based organisation which provides varying supports to learners of migrant and former refugee backgrounds and their families. It offers insights, advice, and teaching strategies to support English language teachers of this learner group. These findings are especially important as the numbers of this learner group are set to increase across Aotearoa New Zealand.

BACKGROUND

The yearly refugee quota for Aotearoa New Zealand was increased from 750 to 1,000 people in 2018, then further increased to 1,500 people in 2020. Although the COVID pandemic interrupted this, six new resettlement

areas were named to cope with the increase, added to the eight reception centres already functioning around the country (Immigration NZ, 2018). These new New Zealanders require support around housing, education, and provision of health services as well as support to develop language and literacy skills which will be crucial to successful settlement in their new country. While this inquiry focuses on supporting literacy development and language skills it is important to acknowledge that these adult learners face a complex range of challenges as they settle into their new country and community. Some must learn written literacy for the first time. There are a variety of government agencies and NGOs who support them in this journey, in which many will face discrimination (Butcher et al., 2006; Marlowe, 2022; Marlowe et al., 2014; Skyrme, 2008). Kaur (2016) suggests the whole area of teaching English to this group is underfunded.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This inquiry will add to already published research in the New Zealand context on teaching this migrant and former refugee background learner group (Benseman, 2014; Field & Kearney, 2021; Hope, 2013; Ryan et al., 2022; Shamem et al., 2002). This research is also informed by Tarone, Bigelow, and Hansen (2009), who argue that learners with limited literacy have received little attention in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. SLA theory has traditionally applied single epistemologies to understanding language acquisition such as socio-cultural theory from Vygotsky (Ellis, 2014) and Norton (2000, 2013); Krashen's cognitive theory (Patrick, 2019) or teacher cognition (Borg, 2003; Feryok, 2010).

A wider frame of analysis for language teaching and acquisition was offered in a special issue of *Applied Linguistics* in which Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2006) view language as "the emergent properties of a multi-agent, complex, dynamic, adaptive system" (p. 558). This acknowledgment of complexity was further developed by Freeman and Cameron (2008) who proposed a complex dynamic systems theory approach in which applied linguistic complex systems are likely to contain many subsystems. These systems are nested one within another, with complex systems at all levels, from the social level to the neurological levels. Larsen-Freeman (2016) suggests that in the case of classroom-oriented research, complexity theory sees a hierarchy from individual minds up to the sociopolitical context of language learning and teaching. Time becomes a significant factor, as emergence in a complex system is not only affected by what is taking place at one point in time, but is also the product of dynamism over time. This involves interconnected timescales, from the moment-by-moment scale of classroom activity to teaching and learning lifetimes (Larsen-Freeman, 2016, p. 379). In this complexity theory approach to language teaching, change, variability, and dynamism over time are key factors for the classroom teacher.

The key ideas of variability and dynamism also underpin the work of the North American Douglas Fir Group of applied linguists who developed transdisciplinary perspectives on language learning. They frame language learning as a complex, ongoing, and multidimensional phenomenon with dynamic and variable interplay among a range of individual neurobiological mechanisms, cognitive and emotional capabilities, and peoples' diverse experiences in their social worlds. These occur over the learners' life spans and along three interrelated dimensions of social activity: micro contexts of social action and interaction, meso contexts of sociocultural institutions and communities, and the macro level of ideological structures (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 24). They identify ten themes for language learning, which were later extended to language teaching through a focus on teacher identity and teaching (De Costa & Norton, 2017), as can be seen in Table 1.

Language learning *Douglas Fir Group (2016)*	**Language teaching** *De Costa and Norton (2017)*
1. Language competencies are complex, dynamic and holistic.	1. Language competencies are complex, dynamic, and holistic.
2. Language learning is semiotic learning.	2. Language teaching is semiotic learning.
3. Language learning is situated and attentionally and socially gated.	3. Language teaching is situated and attentionally and socially gated.
4. Language learning is multi-modal, embodied, and mediated.	4. Language teaching is multi-modal, embodied and mediated.
5. Variability and change are at the heart of language learning.	5. Variability and change are at the heart of language teaching.
6. Literacy and instruction mediate language learning.	6. Literacy and instruction mediate language teaching.
7. Language learning is identity work.	7. Language teaching is identity work.
8. Agency and transformative power are means and goals for language learning.	8. Agency and transformative power are means and goals for language teaching.
9. Ideologies permeate all levels.	9. Ideologies permeate all levels of language teaching.
10. Emotion and affect matter at all levels.	10. Emotion and affect matter at all levels of language teaching.

Table 1: 10 fundamental themes and their implications for language learning and teaching (adapted from De Costa & Norton, 2017, p. 8).

De Costa and Norton's wider themes allow a more spacious and complex understanding of the experience of language teaching and of the needs and experiences of the learners. These will be used later in the analysis of participants' experiences and reflections. Barkhuizen (2021) also offers much to support the complexity of language teaching and language teacher identity. His 2021 book explores experiences of language teacher educators working in a range of professional and institutional contexts, focusing on the domains of pedagogy, research, and service and leadership in institutional and in the community. Though his work is focused on language teacher educators, much is relevant to language teachers. His earlier books on language teacher identity (Barkhuizen, 2017, 2019), offer rich insights and analysis from language teachers around the world.

Other transdisciplinary theorists (McGregor, 2015; Nicolescu, 2014) provide the frame for professionals, practitioners, and individuals with lived experience to be acknowledged across disciplinary boundaries through valuing individual insights and instincts. This was an invitation for me to move beyond the classroom to speak to people who support learners in this learner group, which in turn would assist me to understand their challenges in class.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Participants' experience and perspectives were gathered in two separate series of interviews. Institutional Ethics Approval was gained for the interviews with teachers (Approval Reference WTFE03210220, 2020) and with community-based organisations (Approval reference WTLR05030325, 2025). The first series of interviews was with eight English language teachers of adult learners from migrant and refugee background from around New Zealand. With the constraints of COVID and distance, six were interviewed by Zoom, and two through email exchange. These were single interview events, five of them lasting up to an hour each. Participants responded to

the same set of open questions, whether orally or by email:

- Can you identify personal or professional experiences/training that support your teaching of this cohort of learners?
- What challenges have you experienced?
- What advice would you give to teachers about to begin teaching this group?

Participants had worked in community-based contexts and tertiary institutions in Aotearoa and other countries, the majority for between 11 and 20 years. Two born overseas were bilingual and bicultural, while others born in Aotearoa had varying degrees of fluency in other languages, including te reo Māori. While all eight were women, attempts were made to achieve a better gender balance, so it was not intended to make invisible the important role of male teachers and supporters of the language needs of this learner group. Participants Three and Four team-taught in their context and were interviewed on Zoom together.

The second series of interviews were with staff members in community-based organisations who support migrants and former refugees with a range of programmes. Two staff members provided their experiences and reflections on the key questions below:

- What services or programmes does the organisation offer?
- What are some of the benefits for clients who participate in their programmes?
- What are some of the challenges clients face with participation in programmes they attend, for example language learning programmes?

Initially my chosen methodology was grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Flick, 2018; Guest et al., 2012) because it allowed an iterative revisiting of literatures and related materials alongside analysis of participant data. But in the process of reviewing literature, gathering data, and returning to reflect on insights from the literature I needed to look wider than the classroom. So, despite Ellis's 2014 invitation to research both social and cognitive aspects of language learning, I chose a transdisciplinary approach.

The first process of analysis was to identify an overarching code which gave insight into how each participant perceived their role. The code for Participant One was "culture" as she saw her role as a teacher as a "a cultural bridge into New Zealand" teaching culture as well as language. She had 17 years' experience as a teacher and manager. She had also been a bilingual assistant trainer and policy developer for national Intensive Literacy and Numeracy (ILN) tests, funded through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).

For Participant Two, also with management experience, the code was "communication." She believed that communication was central, and that it was important to have bilingual assistance which can mediate the learning process in a first language. With 20 years' experience as a teacher and a manager, she was primary teacher trained and experienced and had a master's in applied linguistics. She had taught English to adults and trained bilingual assistants in community contexts, and in a tertiary institution.

The code for Participants Three and Four was "ad hoc," as their teaching roles came with no contract and few supporting resources, a situation that lasted for five or six years. Both had postgraduate qualifications and specialist qualifications in teaching English language and literacy. Participant Three, with 18 years' experience, was also primary teacher trained and experienced, and had taught English to adults and done tertiary learning support. Participant Four with 14 years' experience teaching adults English in New Zealand, was bilingual, and had a degree in Education.

Participants Five and Six focused on teaching strategies. Their codes were "language focus" and "using stories." With 14 years' experience, Participant Five was primary teacher trained and experienced, had postgraduate qualifications in teaching English to adults, and had worked at tertiary institutions, including a wānanga. Participant Six was bilingual with 10 years' experience teaching English in New Zealand, two of those teaching this learner group. She had qualifications in teaching English to adults, with a related master's and PhD in teacher cognition.

The final two participants focused on the need for teachers to view the learner as a person with multiple life experiences. The code for Participant Seven was "a whole person" and for Participant Eight "an holistic approach." Both were primary teacher trained and experienced, with specialist post graduate qualifications in teaching English language, and Literacy and Numeracy to Adults. Participant Seven had 20 years' experience in New Zealand and overseas and had Counselling qualifications. Participant Eight had 11 years' teaching experience in New Zealand, including in a tertiary institute, and had a related master's degree.

RESULTS

This inquiry aimed to look beyond the classroom to enable insights into how teachers might support learners, so this section will first offer insights from a community-based participant, and secondly from classroom teachers, in terms of challenges and advice to newer teachers. One community-based organisation which supports new migrants and those with refugee backgrounds provides support with finding emergency housing or a private rental; energy navigators to ensure the house is warm and healthy; support with appointments for the doctor and dentist, and budgeting services. It liaises with counselling services which connect people with a counsellor from a similar cultural background, interpreting services, and appropriate language development support.

An employee describes her role as building relationships, as a connector into the community. The role was funded by the Ministry for Social Development but is now funded by the trust that runs the organisation. Amongst her duties she accompanies individuals to Work and Income where she describes people of refugee background experiencing bullying: "They [the client] are in tears … they are so vulnerable." She believes they need to be treated with more respect. She also described the constant instances of racism, at times physical violence, some of her clients face in the communities in which they live.

One situation she described was of a client family with an older child at a local tertiary institution learning English to prepare to study a professional course. The family was "completely on the bread line" trying to find a place to live. They sat in the office "with heads on the table, depressed." That learner was responsible for his mother and younger brother but was able to set that aside to go to class and focus on learning, despite carrying responsibilities far beyond his age.

I move now to challenges experienced by the teachers. The first challenge articulated by Participants One and Two identifies the time needed to teach and learn at this level, and the scope of the challenge. Participant One responds from the points of view of both a teacher and a team manager who is responsible for the overall budget for the programme: "One of the challenges of teaching, and at management level, is the recognition of the time it takes to become literate in adulthood, never mind a foreign language. That's a headache for managers and budgeters." Participant Two also identifies the scope of the task: "It takes quite a while to realise how big the task of second language literacy is. When you are literate it is very hard to understand what illiteracy is like … you can't hurry the process."

Participants Three and Four explained their challenge with lack of institutional support:

> The classrooms were joined by partitions, so the environment was noisy. The principal kept promising another classroom, but it didn't happen for many years. There were no resources. Over time I tried to source material for refugee adults … I did a lot of photocopying. That lasted for about five or six years ... We didn't have contracts. We were promised and promised … but never received them.

Their experience as teachers stemmed from a constant lack of job security, a less-than-sufficient teaching environment, and an almost complete lack of resources. Their learners were women of refugee backgrounds, some of whom had their baby with them in class which added layers of complexity to the classroom situation.

Participant Six raises the issue of the impacts of past experiences: "Subtle challenges, not easily seen, effects of trauma, family issues, cultural issues that we are not aware of." Participant Seven repeats the effects of trauma and the need to nurture study skills:

> Some learners are suffering emotional trauma. Many are coping with major adjustments to a new way of life, family difficulties and processing their previous experiences. Expect absences … Some do not have the study skills or attitudes to study that we may assume or have ourselves … Mainstream assessments are often difficult. In a very short listening assessment that was obvious to us, one student said, 'There are too many words in the way.'

She also identifies an issue of suitability of assessment type for learners of this background and language development level. Her experience was that the assessment structure was more complex than the learner's skills level. The challenge to create appropriate assessments needs to be taken seriously in courses that require achievement in certain assessment tasks.

Participant Eight identifies issues particularly pertinent to learners who may not have written literacy in their first language(s), referring to "disengagement and a sense of futility at not being able to learn English, especially when they see others learning faster than them." She describes the emotional investment required for individuals to work at their own pace and to be able to accept their own limitations along the way. This echoes Theme Eight, "Agency and transformative power are means and goals for language teaching."

Moving to the advice offered to newer teachers of this group, this encompassed teaching content and strategies, understanding the learners' backgrounds, accommodating their other investments, and doing any professional development available.

Participant One suggests that teachers "negotiate a class culture and code – slowly with cultural inputer/bilingual assistance." This is echoed by Participant Two's advice for bi-lingual assistance: "Use the first language if you can … Don't over plan … ask your learners what they want to learn." Participants Three and Four offer suggestions about accommodating learners' other investments: "Have patience, they are not going to learn quickly … Their life is focused on their babies, and their husband and their home." They also recommend, when training learners who have never had formal schooling before, "Teach them how to learn, for example how to organise their folder … Learners need to be doing work at home as well." Participant Five suggests, "Get to know the learner's journey, their culture and family situation," and highlights the importance of professional development: "Observe other teachers. Do any PD [professional development] about low literacy learners, though not much is available." They then offer discrete teaching content ideas, as the next two participants do: "Use some explicit phonetics, like short and long vowels. Lots of copying … make sure writing is on the line."

Participant Six describes teaching strategies that have worked for her: "Build step by step, for example, I would write my name and the country I come from. They would do that. Then we added home city. Use concrete meaningful things. This makes English meaningful for them." She highlights the need to be aware of affective

factors to "Develop their interest and their confidence." This is echoed by Participant Seven who suggests, "Use structured lesson routines. Ensure topics are personalised around their adult interests, world views and life experiences." She focuses on learners' strengths. "Learners have superb oral memories but are slow with visual decoding," she says, "Some are fantastic and entertaining oral story tellers. Pull vocabulary decoding and grammar out of those stories and recycle often." She also highlights multi-modal strategies, using visuals and discrete sounds: "Teach letter sounds with a key word and picture and introduce combinations progressively: short vowels, a few consonants like m, s, c, t, also initial sounds, and final sounds. Use games and short rhymes to consolidate." Finally, she acknowledges the need to address numeracy skills to support her learners' everyday language needs and suggests NZ Maths as a good website. She suggests: "Find a role that gives each learner mana and constantly encourage them."

Participant Eight advises a holistic attitude to the teaching process: "Smile, welcome and be kind. Learn about them and their family and their story. Be a listener. Be flexible; it's ok; they're doing their best and they are learning." She echoes other participants who highlight the importance of teachers learning about their learners' backgrounds and understanding how this might influence their abilities to learn in the classroom or elsewhere.

DISCUSSION

In this section I will discuss three aspects: insights from a community-based organisation, the challenges of this learner group, and advice to newer teachers. Firstly, insights from the wider social world beyond the classroom may provide greater understanding for the teacher about the stresses some learners may face. This highlights the importance of the teacher working to ensure the classroom is a safe space for learning.

I will relate the challenges participants shared to four of De Costa and Norton's 10 transdisciplinary themes of language teaching (2017). Theme One, "Language competencies are complex, dynamic and holistic" is illustrated in the time-intensiveness and often daunting scope of the challenge of teaching English to this learner group as described by participants One and Two above. Secondly, Theme Four, "teaching is multi-modal, embodied and mediated" (De Costa & Norton, 2017). Participants Six highlights "the subtle challenges not easily seen, the effects of trauma, family issues and cultural issues," while Participant Seven also observes that some learners are suffering from emotional trauma and adjusting to a new life. Consequently, teachers should expect absences from class, hence missed opportunities to learn. All the learning is embodied and mediated by past experiences, the effects of which a teacher may experience only "subtly," as Participant Six explained, but which will be crucial to the learner's language skills development. Participants Three and Four shared a teaching space separated only by a partition, with few resources and no contract, illustrating both their commitment to their learners despite lack of support and the employing organisation's disregard for the professional needs of learners and teachers of this group.

Thirdly, Theme Five, "Variability and change are at the heart of language teaching" (De Costa & Norton, 2017). Learners' varied backgrounds, different gaps in schooling, and the complex social worlds they inhabit over time, all mean that the teacher will need to accommodate constant variability and change at individual and class levels, as Larsen-Freeman (2016) identified with complexity theory. Lastly Theme Ten, "Emotion and affect matter at all levels of language teaching" is illustrated through Participants Three and Fours' emotional investment in their learners despite having no contract. Participant Eight's statement about learners disengaging and feeling their efforts to learn English are "futile" also illustrates this theme. It implies the constant support and encouragement needed by the teacher to hold the space for those learners to find their own emotional resources to continue in this challenging journey of acquiring written and other literacies, such as computer literacy.

Turning now to advice. Participants' advice illustrates De Costa and Norton's Theme Six that "Literacy and instruction mediate language teaching" (2017, p. 8). Participants Five and Seven highlight teaching strategies which are essential for teaching literacy, language and numeracy. Participant five noted the importance of learning from colleagues as in her experience there were few opportunities for professional development for this learner cohort.

The "diverse experiences learners have experienced in their social worlds," as The Douglas Fir Group (2016, p. 24) describe them, are constant influences, though the causes of behaviours are not always obvious in the language classroom. Participant Five advises learning about the learner's journey, their culture and family situation. Participant Six reminds teachers that, though learners may be beginners at learning English, they are adults who negotiate complex lives, so that teaching topics need to suit adult interests, and life experiences. Participant Two warns against overplanning lessons, but advises teachers to ask learners what they need to learn, treating them with respect by allowing them to ask for their own language needs to be addressed in class. Lastly Participants Three and Four advise being patient as their learners seemed more invested in their families, than learning English, so illustrating De Costa and Norton's Theme Ten (2017, p. 8), "Emotion and affect matter at all levels of language teaching." The teacher is then better able to understand and work around the learners' other investments.

CONCLUSION

Professional challenges can come from unexpected causes, such as the border closures which caused a change in student cohort makeup in tertiary level English language classes in Aotearoa New Zealand. Consequently, teachers needed to learn to understand and meet the learning needs of a different learner group. This inquiry suggests that at any time in a teacher's career the opportunity is there to evolve and learn and 'become' a professional with wider and deeper insights in their classroom practice and their understanding of their professional role. This article has argued that learning to meet the English literacy and language needs of a class of adult learners of migrant and refugee background requires more than a single epistemological approach. It has briefly mapped the development within Second Language Acquisition theory of teaching frames that take more complex epistemological approaches, those of complexity theory and transdisciplinary frames of understanding language learning and language teaching.

In drawing on the experiences of participant teachers, and insights from a community-based organisation, it argues, as transdisciplinary theorist physicist Nicolescu (2014) proposed, that looking to professional understandings and experience across disciplines, and to others with lived experience of the issue under inquiry, taking on board anecdotal reflections and experiences, can create new embodied knowledge. Paying attention to personal insights and instincts, this knowledge will, in this case, support teaching literacy and language skills to this learner group of adults with multiple other needs and investments.

What might this mean in class? Approaching learners with patience and support, enabling them space to engage their own agency. "Find a role that gives each learner mana and constantly encourage them," as one participant suggested.

This article has highlighted the need for more professional development for teachers of this learner group. The experiences of participants in one situation illustrate the need for more resources and the dignity of a contract. Echoing one of the teacher participants, the findings suggest that teachers work from a strengths-based, rather than a deficiency, mindset, as every day these learners exhibit courage and commitment to learn English and communication skills that they need to create a new life for themselves and their families. It also highlights that learning new skills at any stage of a teacher's career requires institutional support.

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FROM VISION TO VOCATION: BECOMING A COMMUNITY CONNECTOR THROUGH TRANSDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE-BASED INNOVATION

Anthony Dady

INTRODUCTION

Having been gifted some land near Pirongia by my parents, and being a relationships-based person, I thought it would be good to open a small hotel to provide income for my wife and me. This was to be off-grid and built with "alternative" eco-friendly building techniques and using low-cost, freely available materials. Thus, it would provide opportunities to address issues such as affordable housing and revitalisation of the local tourist industry, as well as offer a passive education to guests about energy efficiency. However, this drive to use what I do for the benefit of others led to my rethinking my idea, and instead doing something that could be of greater benefit.

Being a church minister, I began connecting with church volunteers who were working to improve their communities. Engaging with them multiplied my efforts for societal transformation when compared with just my wife and I trying to improve an area through our hotel. This was also a major change in my own priorities and learning, and in terms of my professional identity formation, as I went from looking at a business idea for my family to facilitating change for the better in communities around New Zealand.

What developed was a project connecting church congregations with their communities. This followed a transdisciplinary, practice-based approach in which transformation was not only a goal for the communities but also a lived experience for me as a practitioner. Becoming—as a central thread in this journey—unfolded through cycles of reflection, dialogue, and action. My faith shaped how I engaged with others, encouraging me to listen deeply and remain open to change. Soft systems thinking and the principles of design thinking supported an iterative approach, where ideas were tested, reframed, and developed in response to stakeholder input. These recursive loops of transdisciplinary research informed my learning, helping to surface new insights, not just about community needs, but also about how I was growing into a new professional identity—moving from planner to connector, and from researcher to practitioner in service of others. All this was grounded in a professional master of applied innovation project that grew from sustainability-focused innovation ideas to community transformation. In short, I became a pracademic, someone Pousadela et al. (2025) define as being both a practitioner and an academic.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

It may seem strange to have gone from a hotel business idea to conducting transdisciplinary community work with a large array of stakeholders. However, my journey through life has equipped me to be able to work in both contexts. I have been an ordained church minister for 25 years, with most of my ministry taking place in the UK. During that time, I also ran my own business and gained an MBA from the University of Northampton.

My response to my calling in ministry has been to want to make the world around me a better place, which has led to serving on the boards of several charities and community interest companies. It is also what drives my desire to want to care for the environment. I was an early adopter of electric cars and for many years all of the electricity used in my home has come from renewable sources. Wanting to improve other people's lives, and society in general, may explain my desire to provide a positive customer service to people while serving them in an eco-friendly hotel. It could also show why I went on from this to focus on affordable and environmentally sustainable housing, as well as vertical farming to supply food to those in need. It is what drives my desire to see others realise their potential and be released to serve those around them.

Upon moving to New Zealand in 2023, I began a master's-level degree course in Design Innovation, which took place at the Design Factory at the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) in Hamilton. It was then that I began planning for my eco-friendly hotel.

There were very few formal teaching sessions at the Wintec Design Factory, as most of the collective learning was conducted through students sharing with one another at "Community of Practice" days. These were times for education and reflection. It was during this process, as well as through engaging with those in my community, that my idea evolved into the process of facilitating churches' meeting community needs.

As its name suggests, the Design Factory advocated the five steps of design thinking when solving problems:

- Empathise (spend time truly getting to know the issues those you are working with face);
- Define (clearly specify what it is that you are trying to help with);
- Ideate (come up with proposals to deal with the clearly defined problem or need);
- Prototype (develop a product or system that may address the problem or need), and
- Test (trial the potential solution and analyse whether or not it meets the stated requirements).

An example is given later of what I am doing in Auckland to put these principles into practice. For more about design thinking, see Razzouk and Shute (2012).

As mentioned, my study was conducted as part of a design innovation course. The idea of a church doing things to help people in the community may not be seen as innovative, but it can be. There are many definitions of innovation, although I like the ideas put forward by Rogers (1995), who describes it as being seen by people as being better than what they currently have, is easy to adopt, and fits their values, experiences, and needs. I made suggestions to the groups I worked with, ideas which they are planning to adopt and are now discussing. I made one Auckland church my focus, and suggested children's games they could put on in the park near their church hall as a starting point for letting people know about other things the church could offer, and as a way of finding out other needs. This idea is already being put into place by enthusiastic members. This will be an opportunity to trial ideas in a design thinking way, while at the same time getting to know community needs and starting design thinking processes with new projects.

A church should exhibit ethical leadership. Sharma et al. (2019) say that qualities such as honesty, integrity, and equality will lead to improved morale among those being led and a greater desire from them to get involved. It will also result in an organisation being viewed more positively which may lead to its being more successful. It should be obvious that ethical leadership should characterise an organisation that wants to promote an ethical way of living. However, it is also something to be desired in the context of meeting community needs, since an ethical leader will be one who is more successful in encouraging those being led to get involved in the process.

Professional identity formation (PIF) is a process that takes place as an employee adopts the values of the organisation that person works for (Bloom, 2022). This is something that could affect the behaviour of church members, as they take on board the mission of the congregation. If the church had a collective and often-proclaimed identity as a group of people who are passionate about making a positive difference in the community, this is something the members would internalise and be concerned about, making them more likely to look for and address community needs.

Innovation, ethical leadership, and professional identity formation, when applied in the context I am focussing on, will lead to a church being more effective in making a positive difference in the community.

A TRANSDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK

I began my study with a literature review. Using a funnel technique, I first read about needs around the world. I refined this by reading about how those needs are being met and how churches are meeting community needs. I then researched what needs there are in New Zealand. Finally, I looked at how churches are meeting those community needs in in this country.

This was a transdisciplinary study with ethics approval from the Waikato Institute of Technology (approval reference WTLR35130924). While carrying out my literature research, I also gave presentations about my work to students and teachers at the Institute. There I solicited short, anonymous input to guide me in my research. This was carried out by my sharing information about my project and then those present writing unnamed responses of a sentence or less to the various questions I had posed. This input was on small sticky pieces of paper and stuck to sheets on the wall where the questions were written. I was never in the room while these responses were submitted, so I had no idea who had written what.

In the next stage, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Christians and non-Christians in many locations from Whangārei to Invercargill. Those who were a part of my study fell into one of three categories:

1. Specific groups I worked closely with and made specific recommendations to:
   - A national church denomination that operates throughout New Zealand, particularly its Auckland congregation;
   - A church in my home town of Cambridge;
   - A Christian School near to where I live.
2. Other Christian organisations from around New Zealand.
3. Members of the public and those not associated with Christian groups.

The wide geographical scope made my work a useful resource to Christians nationally. Furthermore, while the interviewees were Christians and non-Christians, I collaborated with many organisations outside of Christian circles. This made the project transdisciplinary, as I was able to learn best practice and advise the Christian groups accordingly.

I analysed my findings using various techniques. I used concept maps to investigate factors relating to my various community and business ideas. These ideas were scrutinised using CATWOE (customers, actors, transformation process, worldview, owner, and environmental constraints), a system advocated by Checkland (1989) which requires a user to look at various factors and stakeholders who have an interest in an issue. Understanding who would be affected by my study, and their views on the subject, was crucial for carrying out the ideate stage of design thinking.

Doing this early work built a foundation for the design thinking process that I was then able to carry out with those I was working with, as we operated together in discovering the best way for churches to meet community needs.

All of this took place in the context of iterative supervision, analysing and improving my work with the help of academic and industry professionals. I had weekly meetings with my Wintec supervisor, as well as monthly meetings with the head of the course. I also received regular feedback from students and other professors at the Wintec Community of Practice days. Following my weekly meetings with my tutor, I compiled reflective supervision notes. These were sources of insight to not only show what had already been achieved, but also to provide inspiration and direction in moving forward.

I chose a national church leader as an industry partner. I also found myself an industry mentor, a businessperson who was passionate about improving the community and could give me advice from a non-church viewpoint. This meant I was hearing from a variety of voices in addition to the input I was receiving through my research interviews.

The input was constantly reviewed as I continued in my quest for community transformation. This iterative process highlights the recursive nature of my transdisciplinary approach, with feedback loops ensuring my work was being constantly improved as findings from the research process were fed back into the system to guide future work. As I went along, I found themes developing from my interviews by using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry & Hayfield, 2021). Gupta (2025) also advocates and supports an approach highlighting recursiveness, transdisciplinarity, and qualitative research analysed using thematic analysis.

As stated earlier, I initially gained insights into the situation I was seeking to address through anonymous feedback from students and tutors at Wintec events. However, the majority of my data was collected from the semi-structured interviews with Christians and non-Christians in various locations around New Zealand. Some of these people were industry professionals, such as leaders of churches or community organisations, while most were members of the public, some of whom attended church services or events, while others did not. This gave me the opportunity to find out what needs there were in various communities, as well as to see where church members felt they were able to serve. My plan was to put these two factors together (needs and offers of service) so as to maximise the potential community benefit.

Everyone has a paradigm and position from which they work, which influences their method and interpretation. As a practitioner-researcher and faith-based community member, I chose a transdisciplinary pragmatic way of working, taking a qualitative approach to my research so as to discover underlying trends and interwoven areas of need.

The transdisciplinary nature of this study meant I had to go above and beyond the disciplines and beyond what I thought I knew to try and bring the information and stakeholders together. It is the nature of transdisciplinarity to be recursive, recursive meaning that we frame and reframe, construct, deconstruct and reconstruct our knowledge and understanding as we go through the process. That process underpins my story of becoming, of moving from one position to another.

STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

My journey of transformation centred around three identity turning points:

- From hotelier to community facilitator;
- Embracing iterative learning, and
- Becoming a community connector.

This community-improvement project began in the Waipa district (working in Cambridge and Te Awamutu), although it took on a national flavour with the integration of other groups from further afield. One of these was a denomination that had traditionally grown through producing a magazine and presenting lectures, discussing world events and what God had to say about them. Those who were interested often became members of the Church as a result. However, over time the Church grew to believe that what was more important was building relationships with those in the communities where members lived and went to church. The goal was to get to know people and see how the members could serve those around them and be of benefit to the community. For decades they struggled with how to do this, sometimes doing things to be of benefit to local charities, and sometimes with members volunteering with different community groups. However, the congregation had not managed to go out as a church to be of benefit en masse to the communities around them.

A couple of the members of this denomination's Auckland congregation mentioned in interviews the possibility of doing something in the park opposite where the congregation meets. I decided this would be a good place to begin identifying community needs. There is a large children's play area in the park, and parents and children are often to be found walking around and playing there. I thought this would be an easy demographic to target by offering activities that children are likely to enjoy, such as facepainting, balloon modelling, and games in the park. This would then be an opportunity to serve the community while getting to know the local residents and finding out their needs and how the church members could serve them better. When I proposed this course of action to the congregation, several members immediately told me they would like to be involved. I mentioned to the pastor that permission might be needed from the local council to do what I proposed, so he arranged that. Another member got a banner made and bought much of the equipment for the activities.

The pastor was so pleased with what was happening that he wrote a letter to my Wintec tutor to tell him how much what I was doing was of benefit. In addition to this, the church's national director for New Zealand said he would like to employ me to connect with members around the country who were passionate about community activity. In all, receptiveness to my recommendations has led to implementation of my ideas in Auckland and a desire for further application around New Zealand.

I have had to accept and be ready to adapt to this ever-changing landscape as appreciation for the work I have been doing has grown. However, even before that, my literature review had taught me of the need for humility and openness to new ideas. Nicolescu (2014) writes of a person having to acknowledge that he or she does not have all the answers, or even a complete view of reality. Thus, taking on board people's views based on their paradigms is very important; this is something I did in this project.

Even in my literature review, I had to be open to reconsidering my paradigms. At the beginning, I read about the health needs there are in society. I was tempted to ignore this information, as I assumed churches were not equipped to meet such needs. However, most of my interviewees told me of the sense of connection they get from being associated with a church, and even those who had nothing to with churches told me the friendship and camaraderie that churches offer was important. People spoke of the mental health benefits that come from being part of a loving community like a church. One industry professional went on to describe the problems, such as addictions, that can come from loneliness, thus demonstrating the physical health benefits that derive from church affiliation. What I could have written off as not feasible for churches turned out to be what the majority of people I spoke to feel is the most significant thing churches do to meet community needs. My priority in this work is now to facilitate opportunities for connection, something I did not realise was of such importance until I was willing to be open to new input and let my identity in professional practice evolve as a result.

Elsewhere, there has been a shift from what may have seemed like "having a good idea" to stewarding communal effort, dialogue, and shared action. For instance, when I showed my findings and recommendations to one pastor, he asked my permission to discuss them in detail with the rest of the leadership. He also asked me to give a presentation to the congregation to discuss the concepts further. When I visited the church I was told by members

of the leadership team how useful my findings and recommendations were, and how they were exactly the sort of things they needed to hear and act upon. Similarly, the principal of a Christian school I worked with was very grateful for my research and proposals and looks forward to meeting with me to discuss their implementation.

Identity formation has taken place through what I have done. Organisations I have worked with have been keen to be identified as forces for good in the community, and I have been able to form my own identity as someone who facilitates this positive change in these organisations. I have taken their intentions, reflected on their individual situations, and made appropriate suggestions that are both based on my findings and that also fit their contexts. This has given each organisation a way to move forward with their goals that is realistic, attainable, and appreciated.

It was interesting to see the change in my own life that took place when I decided to focus on helping churches and Christian organisations better meet community needs. Having moved to New Zealand in 2023, I had spent my time taking a backseat in terms of getting involved in my community. However, when I approached Christian groups to see if they would like me to involve them in my potential study, I went from being an outsider to being a valued resource. One church offered me employment on a permanent basis and asked me to continue working along community needs lines with them well after my Wintec studies were over. The ethical imperative I felt to continue this important work, as well as the desire of the Christian groups for me to do so, became an experience of integrating into the New Zealand community; I became a community practitioner rather than someone simply doing research to complete a course. This ties in with the notion of praxis, an idea of doing and reflecting that produces self-knowledge and contribution.

My literature review educated me regarding needs and how to meet them. My study into philosophical positions, theories, and systems showed me how I could address issues. However, it was carrying out my project that led me to realise the significance of what I was doing. Rather than approaching the subject apologetically, I began to see that others considered my work to be significant; so much so that people are desperate to read the completed study, I have been asked to provide training based on my findings, people are carrying out my recommendations, and I have been given employment through it.

There is far more to my work than simply trying to deliver my original idea. Although I could have contributed to society through running a hotel, to increase what I can offer I have had to adapt. Even when I had established that my emphasis would be on Christian organisations meeting community needs, that had to evolve as certain organisations were not in a position to collaborate with me as much as they had originally hoped. My focus shifted from a local to a national basis as I was given the opportunity to integrate my paid work with the results I was discovering through my investigation. During the research process, I had the opportunity to engage with more and more stakeholders and build partnerships with them. This led to a shared ownership of problems and solutions, with any success I now see being as a result of this collaboration. Whereas individual success could be defined as having a business idea and making money from it (such as my hotel idea), my success has come from working collaboratively. This has encouraged people to know that they can make a positive difference, to give it a go and see society improved as a result. Mixed in with the success of understanding churches and community needs is the fact that I now get paid a salary for doing it.

My adaptive way of working began with responding to best practice opportunities for furthering my project and led to me taking on more and wider professional roles than originally expected. I became a facilitator, both in terms of enabling interviewees to express themselves, but also in communicating how community needs can be met. I took on the role of ethical leader as I brought what people knew they should be doing (making the lives of people in their communities better) to the forefront of their minds. I showed people who were at a loss as to how to make a difference what they could realistically do to improve society. I also became a co-creator as I worked with people in interviews to help them uncover their feelings and ideas. This co-creation also meant working with groups to help them discover their communal talents and assets and how they could be used to meet the societal needs I had uncovered.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The process I have gone through has shown me that one's identity in professional practice evolves through deep listening, structured reflection, and a willingness to let go of fixed outcomes.

This journey reflects becoming, of moving from one point to another. This is a process that aligns values, vision, and context over time. I knew it was important for Christians to help those in need and make a positive difference in their communities. I saw a way to facilitate this through discovering needs and aligning these needs with the talents and passions of local Christians. I was willing to adapt as circumstances and opportunities evolved. This led to going into employment to investigate needs around New Zealand and demonstrate how my work can be of benefit on a national basis.

My pracademic journey is one I feel others would benefit from going on, not necessarily focussing on the same issue, but through learning to approach things they are passionate about in a similar way. I changed as a person as I studied literature concerning meeting community needs, wrote a master's thesis about the subject, and put my findings into practice in real-life situations. My process was iterative as I analysed and refined my work. It was also community anchored as I sought to work with partners in improving the lives of others. This was an opportunity to conduct a project where I could both learn and lead. I suggest that other pracademics take the same approach.

My findings could help someone in a similar situation to me who wants to carry out transdisciplinary work. They may also be useful to Christian groups throughout New Zealand, and possibly further afield. Moreover, my findings could be of benefit to all people wanting to make a positive difference in their communities, regardless of their faith. However, the scope of my project was clearly defined, and as such, I was not trying to help people of other faiths, or of no faith, in their community outreach. I did not intend to advise secular groups about what they could do to improve, not because I did not want such improvement, but because this was beyond the boundaries of the project. This additional level of community involvement could be the focus of future studies.

Anthony Dady grew up in the UK, where he gained an MBA, although he has also studied in the USA and New Zealand. In addition to his church ministry around the world, he has worked with many charities and community groups. He served as a councillor and mayor of Corby (UK) before moving to New Zealand in 2023.

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FROM GIRMIT TO GROWTH: A JOURNEY OF CULTURAL IDENTITY, LEADERSHIP AND MATHEMATICS EDUCATION

Ritesh Navin Kumar

OVERVIEW

In the evolving landscape of education, professional identity is no longer a fixed construct, but a dynamic process shaped by continuous reflection, responsiveness to change, and a commitment to personal and professional growth (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This article presents my journey of professional transformation shaped by lived experience, cultural heritage, and responsive leadership in mathematics education. Framed within the broader context of the Indian diaspora, cultural displacement, and political upheaval in Fiji, this narrative traces how my journey from Fiji to New Zealand not only reshaped my identity but also transformed how I teach, lead, and continue to learn. Central to this narrative is a critical inquiry into the intersection of mathematics anxiety, metacognition, and cultural heritage.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

As a person of colour working within an education system shaped by colonial ideologies, I have navigated a career marked by personal, cultural, and professional transformation. As conveyed in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, "The living being is said to be of a particular faith according to the modes he has acquired" (Prabhupada, 1983, 17.3). This verse has been a guiding principle in my leadership journey, reinforcing the idea that our belief is the foundation of becoming. As I reflect on my past and examine the intersections of my identity, I realise how deeply my ancestral roots inform my teaching philosophy and leadership in mathematics education.

Growing up in Vaivai Lautoka, a remote Fijian village without electricity or running water, I experienced hardship firsthand. Walking barefoot to school and studying by kerosene lamp taught me the value of persistence, purpose, and appreciation for learning. Despite material hardship, life was filled with purpose. As a fourth-generation descendant of *Girmitiyas*, the indentured labourers brought to Fiji under colonial rule from India, I carry a deep awareness of historical trauma, intergenerational resilience, and structural inequities that persist today. This history informs not only my personal identity but also how I conceptualise my teaching practice in the classroom and beyond.

Guided by the ancient Hindu scriptures such as the *Ramayan* and *Bhagavad-Gītā*, my parents nurtured in me a respect for moral integrity. These texts explore the challenges of doubt, fear, and decision-making, offering insights into self-awareness, resilience, and leadership that remain relevant in educational contexts today. Principles such as *dharma* (righteous duty), *karma* (ethical action), *gyan* (knowledge), and *seva* (selfless service) were lived practices. For me, *karma* is central to my evolving role as a mathematics leader. It highlights the significance of responsibility and accountability, not just in personal actions but in the broader influence we have on others. Today, these principles ground my research into mathematics anxiety and metacognition, shaping my view of education as a journey of professional growth and shared empowerment.

ANCESTRAL ROOTS: THE *GIRMIT* ERA

The abolition of African slavery led to labour shortages across British colonies, prompting the establishment of the Indian Indenture System (IIS) in 1838 (Mishra, 2009). The IIS was a rebranded form of slavery, marked by deceptive recruitment practices, oppressive working conditions, and inhumane treatment (Lal, 1983; Mishra, 2009). By the time the IIS system was abolished in 1917, over 1.3 million Indians had been transported to colonies such as Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, and Fiji (Lal, 2012).

In Fiji, the sugarcane industry relied heavily on Indian labour. On 14 May 1879, the *Leonidas* brought the first group of 463 labourers to Fiji (Lal, 1983). By 1916, over 60,000 Indians had arrived (Lal, 1983; Mishra, 2009). Among them were my great-grandparents: simple, innocent villagers deeply rooted in their culture. Their journey was harrowing; herded like animals onto overcrowded ships, they endured a gruelling two-and-a-half-month sea voyage (Lal, 2012), permanently severed from their families and ancestral land. My father often recounted horrific stories of how children, pregnant mothers, and those who died of starvation were tossed into the sea. The colonisers, he said, were barbaric, heartless beings who took innocent lives and looted India. Many, including my great-grandparents, lost all contact with their families in India. Hence, I am unable to trace the exact origins of my ancestors in Northern India.

The term *Girmit*, a phonetic adaptation of the English word "agreement," became a common term to describe the indenture contract (Lal, 2012). Those who served under it in Fiji became known as *Girmitiyas*. They were forced to endure harsh and dehumanising living and working conditions. This exploitation often involved physical abuse, low wages and, at times, the complete denial of wages (Lal, 1985a; Prasad, 2006). Harrowing stories such as that of Kunti, a *Girmitiya* woman who leapt off a cliff to escape rape by a European overseer (Lal, 1985b) reflect the gravity of their suffering. These conditions reflect the deliberate strategies used to control and oppress indentured labourers. Yet, in the face of such adversity, the resilience and strength of the *Girmitiyas* prevailed.

After decades of indentured labour, *Girmitiyas* were nominally offered the option to return to India. However, research suggests that colonial authorities manipulated repatriation policies to retain a steady supply of cheap labour (Lal, 2004). My great-grandparents, like many others, remained and rebuilt their lives in Fiji, unknowingly setting the stage for future generations to face ongoing marginalisation and structural discrimination. The brutal legacy of the *Girmit* system remains underrepresented in official histories but continues to survive through intergenerational storytelling, such as the accounts passed down to me by my father. The courage of my ancestors shapes my commitment to teaching and informs how I confront systemic barriers in education.

GIRMIT LEGACY

Brought to Fiji from different regions of India, *Girmitiyas* formed a new identity as Fiji-Indian. By combining various dialects and cultural elements, they created Fiji-Hindi, a koiné language (Lal, 2012) that was passed down through generations as our mother tongue. Denied access to native land ownership, they survived by leasing land from Indigenous Fijians and cultivating their own farms or establishing businesses. Despite their pain and hardship, the *Girmitiyas* exhibited incredible resilience and laid the foundation for future generations by prioritising education and preserving cultural heritage.

The stories of trauma and resilience passed down through my family are not just historical events but personal legacies that have deeply influenced my worldview. My father's recounting of their struggles and endurance instilled in me a strong sense of responsibility to serve others and honour their sacrifices. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* emphasises, "You have the right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions" (Prabhupada, 1983, 2.47), and continues to guide my approach to leadership, focusing on purposeful action and integrity without attachment to outcomes. The Girmit legacy is not only a part of my family's history but also a powerful source of inspiration in my professional journey. As a descendant of *Girmitiyas*, I carry their pain,

strength, and dreams within me. Understanding Girmit legacy helps ground my identity and strengthens my resolve to lead in ways that honour cultural heritage and promote justice.

WHY MATHEMATICS EDUCATION?

In a setting marked by poverty, spiritual devotion, and communal labour, mathematics provided not only clarity but a glimpse of possibility beyond the sugarcane fields. I recall moments on the farm, drenched in sweat, yet my mind preoccupied by a calculus problem, revealing a profound tension between survival and the transformative potential of learning. It was, in Mezirow's (2000) terms, a "disorienting dilemma," the spark of transformation that redirected my life from manual labour to intellectual pursuit. Higher education was not merely a personal aspiration, but a necessary path out of generational poverty.

Mathematics, once a personal refuge, became a calling and a professional responsibility to uplift others through teaching. I was fortunate to continue my tertiary studies through a government scholarship. However, the racially charged violence during the 1987 and 2000 coups where Fiji-Indians were targeted, looted, and assaulted, ultimately compelled me to leave Fiji. I arrived in New Zealand carrying not only the grief of displacement but also a deep sense of purpose and hope for what could still be built.

A JOURNEY OF IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP IN NEW ZEALAND

Transitioning to New Zealand brought cultural dislocation and challenges. I carried the weight of my family's sacrifices, hopes, and expectations, yet I was unsure of my own place in an unfamiliar world. During uncertain moments, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* verse "For the doubting soul there is happiness neither in this world nor in the next" (Prabhupada, 1983, 4.40) reminded me that doubt undermines both clarity and action. It taught me that cultivating self-belief was not optional, but necessary to move forward with purpose, just as my ancestors had done in the face of adversity.

The resilience of my *Girmitiya* ancestors who preserved their cultural identity while adapting to a foreign land, mirrors that of my own journey. As a child, I did not fully grasp the significance of this inheritance, but over time, their stories laid the foundation for my professional identity. Experiences of racism in New Zealand have at times, deeply affected my wellbeing, challenging my sense of belonging and identity. These are not isolated incidents but reflect broader systemic issues that many minority learners and educators continue to face (Bell, 2021). Racism has no place in New Zealand, and my cultural heritage instils in me a firm rejection of it. I draw strength from this dual heritage while connecting with diverse learners. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* teaches: "Whatever you do, … and whatever austerities you perform, do that, … as an offering..."(Prabhupada, 1983, 9.27). This philosophy inspires me to lead not for personal recognition, but in service to the communities I belong to. This cultural and spiritual foundation sustains my leadership, both within my school and nationally, through roles such as National Assessment Moderator. Being awarded the University of Auckland's Kalman Teacher Excellence Prize in 2021 reinforced not only my professional impact, but also the values of integrity and service that underpin my work.

My identity as a mathematics educator is still evolving, continually shaped by lived experience. This transformation affirms that our histories are not burdens but guiding forces that inform our becoming. Drawing on autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011), I see my personal stories not merely as reflection, but as knowledge that shapes how I teach, lead, and understand myself. The shift from classroom teacher to curriculum leader and researcher has been a journey of ongoing reflection. Each step has pushed me to re-examine my values and responsibilities, aligning with Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan's (2013) concept of "professional becoming."

LOST IDENTITY

Fiji-Indians are distinct from contemporary Indian populations. The misclassification of Fiji-Indians in New Zealand perpetuates a sense of lost identity. As *Girmitiya* descendants rooted in the Pacific, we exist on the fringes of New Zealand's cultural and educational frameworks. Frequently categorised under broad ethnic labels such as "Asian" or "Other," Fiji-Indians are often excluded from Pacific-focused education policies and benefits allocated to Pasifika communities. Macpherson (2016) highlights the negative impact of such misclassification on identity formation, educational outcomes, and access to social resources. It demonstrates that accurate demographic categorisation is essential for ensuring that communities are properly supported in their pursuit of educational and social equity.

Recognising these aspects is crucial for supporting educational inclusion and cultural acknowledgement. New Zealand's policymakers must acknowledge Fiji-Indians as an Indo-Pasifika community. This would reflect our unique cultural and historical legacy, grant appropriate access to resources and cultural supports, and affirm our place within New Zealand's diverse society.

BECOMING A TEACHER-LEADER IN NEW ZEALAND

Moving to New Zealand, I soon recognised the shared legacies of colonisation between Māori and Pacific peoples and my own *Girmitiya* heritage. This awareness deepened my empathy and strengthened my commitment to serve those often marginalised by the educational system. It also reaffirmed my responsibility, as a leader, to uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi: partnership, protection, and participation (Ministry of Education, 2019), in all aspects of my teaching practice.

Mathematics, as a human construct, provides a unique framework for understanding and interpreting the world. For me, it is not merely a subject; it is a lens through which I engage with the world around me. I have long been fascinated by how nature inherently follows mathematical principles, from the spirals of shells and river meanders to the tessellations in a beehive (Devlin, 2000). These patterns are not just mathematical curiosities; they reflect a universal language that mathematics helps us decode, offering insights into the beauty and structure inherent in our surroundings. Beyond its structural presence, mathematics equips individuals with essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000), which are necessary to navigate the complexities of the twenty-first century. Yet, for many students, mathematics remains a source of anxiety, fear, and disengagement (Ashcraft, 2002). This disconnect, where a subject so integral to understanding the world can leave so many students feeling alienated and distressed, is the foundation of my doctoral research.

RESEARCH ON MATHEMATICS ANXIETY: A BARRIER TO LEARNING

I am increasingly concerned about the persistent issues of disengagement and underachievement in mathematics. These challenges are compounded when students struggle to find meaning in mathematical content or fail to see its relevance to real-life situations (Kaiser & Schwarz, 2019). Such disconnection often results in negative attitudes toward the subject. Students' sentiments such as, "Where am I going to use this? Do I really need this? Mathematics is hard" or "Why do I have to learn this?" reflect not only cognitive struggles but also deep emotional and cultural disconnections from the curriculum.

Mathematics anxiety is a significant affective barrier that negatively impacts students' performance and willingness to engage with mathematics (Ashcraft, 2002). This psychological phenomenon disrupts working memory, which has a limited capacity for processing and holding information (Ashcraft & Kirk, 2001). When anxiety occupies cognitive resources, it reduces the availability of mental space needed for problem-solving and mathematical reasoning, thereby impairing performance and fostering avoidance behaviours (Ashcraft, 2002). I have noticed

students with high levels of mathematics anxiety often lack confidence and tend to avoid mathematics tasks resulting in academic underachievement. This psychological burden is worrying in the twenty-first century, where mathematical literacy is essential for a wide range of academic and career opportunities (Ashcraft, 2002).

Despite facing cultural disconnection, racism, and systemic barriers, I focus on improving mathematics outcomes by addressing both systemic barriers and the importance of relational, culturally grounded leadership.

This research uses a mixed-methods approach:

1. **Quantitative Survey:** Conducted with 298 secondary students at Henderson High School via Qualtrics, measuring mathematics anxiety and metacognitive awareness using validated scales.
2. **Autoethnography:** A critical reflection of my identity as Fiji-Indian mathematics educator.

Ethics approval was granted by the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee (Reference: 976).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mathematics anxiety

Mathematics anxiety is a feeling of tension, apprehension, or fear that interferes with mathematical performance, often resulting in avoidance of mathematical tasks, reduced confidence, and diminished achievement (Ashcraft, 2002).

Table 1 presents a prevalence of mathematics anxiety across gender, ethnicity and year level among students at Henderson High School. The mathematics anxiety levels were scored between 18 (Low) and 90 (Severe).

		Mathematics Anxiety	Mathematics Anxiety Levels							
			Low (18-34)		Moderate (35-54)		High (55-75)		Severe (76-90)	
		Mean	Count (N)	Table N %	Count (N)	Table N %	Count (N)	Table N %	Count (N)	Table N %
Gender	Female | Wahine	59	3	1.0%	45	15.1%	77	25.8%	12	4.0%
	Male | Tāne	48	27	9.1%	75	25.2%	46	15.4%	0	0.0%
	Other	54	0	0.0%	6	2.0%	7	2.3%	0	0.0%
Ethnicity	Asian, Indian or Other	48	9	3.0%	29	9.7%	18	6.0%	0	0.0%
	Māori, Pasifika	55	5	1.7%	60	20.1%	59	19.8%	6	2.0%
	NZ European/Pakeha	54	16	5.4%	37	12.4%	53	17.8%	6	2.0%
Year	Year 9	52	14	4.7%	49	16.4%	46	15.4%	4	1.3%
	Year 10	57	3	1.0%	26	8.7%	23	7.7%	5	1.7%
	Year 11	53	4	1.3%	26	8.7%	25	8.4%	2	0.7%
	Year 12	50	8	2.7%	17	5.7%	17	5.7%	1	0.3%
	Year 13	56	1	0.3%	8	2.7%	19	6.4%	0	0.0%
	Total	**53**	**30**	**10.1%**	**126**	**42.3%**	**130**	**43.6%**	**12**	**4.0%**

Table 1: Prevalence of mathematics anxiety (N = 298).

Survey results showed a high prevalence of mathematics anxiety, with 89.9 percent of participants reporting some level. The overall mean score of 53 placed most in the moderate category. Overall, 42.3 percent had moderate anxiety, 43.6 percent high, and 4.0 percent severe. Mathematics anxiety affects learners differently. Low to moderate levels can be facilitative (Ashcraft & Krause, 2007), as a manageable amount of worry may boost alertness and encourage preparation, improving performance. In contrast, high to severe anxiety is generally debilitative, reducing working-memory capacity and focus, and impairing problem-solving ability (Ashcraft & Krause, 2007). Teaching strategies should aim to lessen the negative effects of high or severe mathematics anxiety, while helping students use lower levels in a positive and productive way.

Gender differences were evident. Female students reported a higher mean anxiety score (M = 59) than males (M = 48). A substantial 25.8 percent were classified as having high anxiety and 4.0 percent as experiencing severe anxiety. Among male students, 15.4 percent reported high anxiety, with no reports of severe anxiety. These findings are consistent with established research on gender-based variations in mathematics anxiety (Devine et al., 2012).

Ethnic disparities also emerged. Māori and Pasifika learners recorded a mean score of 55, closely followed by NZ European/Pākehā students at 54. In contrast, students identifying as "Asian, Indian, or Other" ethnicities reported lower anxiety levels (M = 48). Among Māori and Pasifika learners, 19.8 percent experienced high anxiety and 2.0 percent severe anxiety. These differences reflect structural inequities and the effects of cultural dissonance in mathematics education (Grootenboer & Marshman, 2016).

Year-level analysis revealed that Year 10 students reported the highest mean mathematics anxiety score (M = 57), with 94.7 percent experiencing moderate to severe levels. Nearly half (49.1 percent) were classified within the high to severe anxiety categories. This notable increase coincides with the rollout of the mandatory NCEA Numeracy Corequisite: Common Assessment Activities (CAAs), typically introduced at this level. While CAAs are designed to evaluate essential numeracy skills through digitally delivered, context-based tasks (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2024), they may inadvertently exacerbate stress among students already vulnerable to mathematics anxiety.

Year 13 students reported considerable mathematics anxiety, with 19 out of 28 students (67.9 percent) falling into the high anxiety category and a mean score of 56. While some senior students may develop coping mechanisms, the persistence of elevated anxiety amid the academic pressures of University Entrance requirements, highlight the need for better scaffolding and targeted wellbeing support.

For many, mathematics anxiety stems from cultural disconnection, past negative experiences, and a lack of representation in the curriculum. This emotional barrier undermines engagement and achievement, reinforcing cycles of avoidance and reduced self-efficacy (Beilock & Maloney, 2015; Hembree, 1990).

Metacognition: A key to overcoming mathematics anxiety

This study also investigates the role of metacognition as a mitigating factor in mathematics anxiety. Metacognition is defined as a person's ability to reflect on and regulate their own thinking (Flavell, 1979). The metacognition scores generated from the surveys ranged between 20 (low metacognition) and 100 (very high metacognition).

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Metacognition	Year 9	112	64.68	12.017	1.136	62.43	66.93	22	93
	Year 10	57	62.61	12.106	1.604	59.40	65.83	27	86
	Year 11	57	65.40	10.546	1.397	62.61	68.20	41	95
	Year 12	43	67.47	11.083	1.690	64.05	70.88	47	92
	Year 13	28	69.25	8.763	1.656	65.85	72.65	52	85
	Total	**297**	**65.26**	**11.448**	**0.664**	**63.95**	**66.56**	**22**	**95**

Table 2: Metacognition across year levels.

The overall mean metacognition score was 65.26 (SD = 11.45), indicating a moderate to high self-awareness in learning. A clear progression was observed across year levels. Year 13 students had the highest mean score (M = 69.25), followed by Year 12 (M = 67.47), while Year 10 students reported the lowest mean score (M = 62.61). This trend suggests that metacognitive abilities generally develop with age, experience, and academic maturity.

The broad score range (22–95) reflects significant variation in how students perceive and regulate their learning. Those with stronger metacognitive skills are typically better equipped to manage academic challenges, regulate emotions, and apply effective problem-solving strategies; factors closely linked to reduced mathematics anxiety (Schraw & Dennison, 1994). These findings emphasise the need to explicitly develop metacognitive strategies as a pathway to reducing anxiety and improving mathematics engagement and achievement.

Relationship between mathematics anxiety and metacognition

A statistically significant negative correlation was found between mathematics anxiety and metacognitive awareness ($r = -0.594$, $p < .001$), indicating that students with higher metacognitive skills tend to experience lower levels of mathematics anxiety. This supports previous findings suggesting that metacognitive regulation plays a key role in reducing anxiety and improving learning outcomes in mathematics (Veenman, 2017), thereby reinforcing the view that metacognition serves as a protective factor against such anxiety.

Teaching metacognitive strategies in ways that affirm students' cultural identities can disrupt cycles of disengagement and low self-confidence shaped by systemic barriers. This insight has transformed my practice. I now prioritise tools such as self-questioning, reflective thinking, and cognitive scaffolding; strategies that help learners to become more aware of their thinking and more confident in approaching mathematical problems. These strategies resonate with both Indigenous and my ancestral worldviews. The Māori concepts of ako (reciprocal learning) and whakaaro (reflection) closely align with the principles of metacognitive development. Similarly, the *Bhagavad-Gītā's* teaching, "One must elevate oneself by one's own mind and not degrade oneself. The mind is the friend of the conditioned soul, and his enemy as well" (Prabhupada, 1983, 6.5), offers timeless guidance on self-awareness and inner discipline. For me, helping students think reflectively is not just effective teaching; it is an ethical responsibility, grounded in care, purpose, and equity.

DIGITAL OUTREACH – GIVING BACK

As a teacher-leader, it is my *dharma* to create a level playing field for all students. In response to the widespread mathematics anxiety and inequitable access to resources, I founded Maths Tutor NZ, a free YouTube channel. Since its launch, the channel has grown to feature over 112, NCEA-aligned instructional videos and has reached more than 184,000 views. This platform is not just a digital teaching tool but my way of giving back. Reflecting on my experience as a child without adequate access to resources, electricity, or outside help, I understand the barriers many students face. Maths Tutor NZ was created to ensure that no learner in New Zealand misses out due to lack of resources. It reflects my commitment to culturally responsive teaching and is grounded in the values of manaakitanga (care and generosity), ako (shared learning), and whanaungatanga (building strong relationships).

The Maths Tutor NZ platform is informed by the principles of interactive explicit instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2011), incorporates scaffolding techniques to reduce cognitive load (Sweller, 1988), and integrates metacognitive prompts to support students' reflective thinking. It follows the mantra: "I do, we do, you do." By aligning with NCEA mathematics standards, Maths Tutor NZ makes high-quality learning accessible to all students and teachers across New Zealand. This initiative is rooted in my lived experience: growing up in Fiji, where I studied under a kerosene lamp with limited resources. It reflects my commitment to ensuring others do not face the same barriers. The *Bhagavad-Gītā's* teaching, "You have the right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions" (Prabhupada, 1983, 2.47), encourages me to perform my duties without being attached to the results. This principle promotes leadership where I prioritise the process and service over personal rewards, helping to cultivate a culture of integrity and commitment.

CONCLUSION

From humble beginnings in the sugarcane fields of Fiji to a leadership role in mathematics education in New Zealand, my identity has been shaped by the enduring strength of my *Girmitiya* ancestors and transformed through hardship, cultural heritage, and hope. Reflecting on the challenges faced by my parents and ancestors has deepened my capacity to confront adversity with strength and purpose. Guided by my parents' wisdom, I now view teaching and leadership not as roles, but as responsibilities anchored in service and purpose.

Findings from my doctoral research have confirmed that mathematics anxiety is a widespread issue, particularly among Māori, Pasifika, and female students. My research highlights the urgency of addressing mathematics anxiety, which affects nearly 90 percent of participants in New Zealand. Students with higher metacognitive skills consistently reported lower levels of anxiety. These insights affirm that explicitly teaching metacognitive strategies can shift mathematics from a subject of fear to source of empowerment.

From a work-based learning perspective, these insights have reshaped my professional identity as a mathematics leader. My teaching has evolved from delivering content to fostering learner wellbeing. This journey has strengthened my commitment to making mathematics inclusive and empowering. Rooted in cultural identity and self-reflection, my teaching now centres on helping all learners build confidence and overcome barriers to succeed. This perspective aligns with Paulo Freire's (1970) belief that education should be a liberating force, enabling individuals to challenge the status quo and realise their potential.

The teachings of the *Ramayan* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* have shaped my view of education as an ethical duty that values the journey of learning over its rewards. This transformation affirms that our histories are not burdens but guiding forces that inform our becoming. They offer strength, direction, and purpose. As conveyed in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Lord Krishna advises Arjuna: "Let a man lift himself by himself; let him not degrade himself" (Prabhupada, 1983, 6.5). This is a call to all educators: *Know your learners. Know their fears. Know your purpose.* Through this knowledge, you will not only teach but also lead; and in leading, you will transform both mindsets and lives.

AI statement

In the preparation of this article, the author utilised OpenAI's ChatGPT to assist with refining sentence structure. The AI tool was employed to enhance the clarity and coherence of the manuscript. All content generated was based on the author's original reflections about professional becoming aligned with the article's objectives.

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CULINARY CROSSROADS: EXPLORING THE VALUE OF GRADUATE WORK EXPERIENCE IN TOKYO'S GASTRONOMIC SCENE

Kylee New

INTRODUCTION

Internships offer transformative experiences, fostering personal growth, cultural awareness, and professional development (Seyitoğlu, 2019). This article explores the journey of two recent New Zealand culinary graduates who undertook a year-long placement in a Kiwi-owned Japanese fusion restaurant in Tokyo. Initiated through a personal connection with an expatriate, the opportunity aimed to bridge cultural and culinary worlds, offering graduates a chance to refine their skills and discover their professional identities. Their experience, marked by adaptation, challenge, and growth, exemplifies the theme of "becoming"—not just chefs, but global citizens navigating the complexities of cross-cultural environments.

Recognising the distinct potential of this initiative, the restaurateur—together with an academic staff member from Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology (Toi Ohomai) in the Bay of Plenty—decided to pitch the idea to a cohort of 'near' graduating culinary students, prior to their transition into professional roles within New Zealand's hospitality sector. Two motivated students embraced the distinctive opportunity extended by faculty staff: a year-long, immersive professional placement at a high-end restaurant situated in Yushima, Tokyo. This opportunity served as a platform for skill development and meaningful cultural exchange, effectively connecting the culinary traditions of the students' homeland with those of their host environment. It provided a transformative space for both personal and professional growth within their chosen career. Findings revealed the importance of academic institutions working closely with hospitality establishments to find solutions to the many challenges the hospitality industry currently faces globally (Mqwebedu et al., 2022). This was an unexpected finding and could serve as a valuable consideration for enhancing future graduate experiences.

The two participants in this study reported that their experience in Japan led to significant self-discovery and insights into professional practices that they believe will help shape their futures. Reflecting on their arrival, "Jonah" remarked, "When we arrived at Narita airport, it really hit us. This country is super busy, a bit crazy and I just hope it doesn't eat us alive." This research deepens our understanding of how recent graduates navigate and adapt to such a foreign environment within the field of culinary education, unveiling the challenges faced and highlighting the significance of preparation, adaptability, and innovative thinking as essential components in achieving culinary excellence and fostering the process of professional becoming.

SETTING THE SCENE

The idea of promoting an internship-like experience came to fruition through the collaboration between the two main parties and, of course, the enthusiasm of both graduates. In alignment with his original ties, the restaurant

owner, originally from Tauranga, extended the opportunity to culinary graduates from the Bay of Plenty. By January 2023, two brothers who had successfully completed two years in the Culinary Arts Programme, commenced their placement at the four-year-old restaurant, renowned for its expertise in sake and an appreciation of New Zealand wine. Identifying as New Zealand Māori and aged 20 and 22 respectively, the participants—referred to here as "Jonah" and "Steve"—hail from a socioeconomically disadvantaged area within the wider Bay of Plenty region (Kawerau District Council, 2024).

Wright and Mulvey's (2021) research admits there is no commonly agreed definition of the term internship as there are so many variables involved but, typically, all internships involve 'hands on' work experience with variations in duration, pay, and formality. This planned opportunity fitted the description of an internship, even though there was limited formal documentation to 'seal' the idea. Gomez (2023) found that international experiences, whether a formal internship or similarly targeted programme, resulted in a positive self-perception of employability skills for participants. This positive perception was shown to increase according to the duration of the internship, generally leading to more accumulation of knowledge and skills. Internships can significantly impact students' perceptions of career development within the hospitality industry and enhance their future marketability (Mashuri, 2020). These experiences demonstrate to potential employers that graduates have gained practical, real-world exposure and are committed to pursuing careers, or at least being employed, in the industry for the foreseeable future. Literature indicates a correlation between internship experience and career success. Renowned New Zealand chef and *MasterChef* judge Simon Gault believes that experiences gained during a student's internship result in quicker employment after graduation, a higher salary, and higher job satisfaction (Farrell-Green, 2007).

Moreover, the internship experience smooths the transition from student life to work life and allows students to learn aspects of the industry that are not always possible to teach or even simulate in the classroom. Armed with knowledge, new entrants are more prepared to face the many challenges in the industry. Internship is therefore used as a platform to build and develop awareness of the skills needed in the industry. According to Mashuri (2020), this experience not only helps students adapt but also equips them to thrive in the industry while pursuing their career ambitions. Offering the time to train, upskill, and develop a culinary graduate is something that does not happen very often and to see such a positive, humble attitude toward offering this opportunity to someone less resourced, with the big picture aim of bringing those skills back to their homeland, is inspiring.

Individual connections were established between each of the two students and the owner of the wine and craft sake bar based in downtown Tokyo. Through informal discussions conducted via messaging platforms, the owner sought to assess the students' authenticity, motivation and readiness for the opportunity. Pre-departure interviews were subsequently conducted to explore the graduates' expectations, aspirations, and intended outcomes for their time abroad. In parallel, the restaurant owner was interviewed to clarify his expectations and objectives for hosting the students. These preliminary engagements contributed valuable insights that may inform the future formalisation of an internship arrangement between the parties involved.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As part of an approved research project conducted through Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, data was collected, gathered and analysed using a qualitative research methodology. This approach was chosen to allow for a rich, nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of the two graduates who had participated in this informal internship abroad. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study aimed to capture an authentic account of the graduates' feelings, attitudes, and perceptions regarding their international placement, including such areas as personal growth, cultural adaptation, and professional development. Prior to the commencement of the research, the proposal underwent rigorous scrutiny by an experienced ethics committee. The committee raised critical questions concerning the validity, relevance, and ethical considerations of the research topic, particularly in relation to informed consent, confidentiality, and the potential impact on participants. After a

thorough review and necessary revisions, the committee granted formal approval, ensuring that the research adhered to institutional and ethical standards and was focused on producing meaningful and trustworthy insights.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to collect material using an interview guide to steer them. The questioning in these semi-structured interviews did not always follow a set order as it depended on the interview process and the responses of each participant. The benefit of using semi-structured interviews to collect this data was that it promoted opportunities to enquire about things that could not be observed, such as a person's thoughts and feelings, or how they interpret the world around them (Amundsen et al., 2017). Interviews occurred at the participants' convenience (there was a time difference to consider), recorded (with their permission) using a phone application called Otter, and later transcribed as a digital document. Each interview was listened to repeatedly while making notes and initial observations. The data provided by each interview was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) approach to thematic analysis. This system was primarily inductive, allowing themes to emerge rather than being dictated by pre-conceived ideas. These initial codes were then grouped into distinguishable themes.

The examination of interviews before, during, and after tenure revealed two central themes: the perceived benefits of international experience, and the challenges encountered during the participants' time in a foreign country. The opportunity to advance vital skills in a chosen career in an organised placement abroad is recognised as a core approach for preparing graduates to be global inhabitants and developing their cultural intelligence (Holtbrügge & Engelhard, 2017). This finding underscores the importance of adequately preparing graduates for transformative and occasionally daunting experiences and highlights the necessity for tertiary institutions to equip students with essential soft skills that are integral to various positions in their selected field.

RESULTS

The results of three rounds of interviews conducted over the course of a year, as mentioned above, revealed two overarching themes. The benefits of international placement included skill enhancement, personal growth, improved language proficiency, and increased cultural awareness while challenges were also encountered, such as navigating linguistic and cultural differences, and adjusting attitudes and perspectives. These experiences collectively initiated a profound journey, strengthening the graduates' connection to their cultural heritage while shaping their evolving professional identities.

Both participants expressed that their involvement in the Tokyo placement facilitated the development of essential skills, including collaboration, adaptability, and creative problem-solving. This growth stemmed from daily opportunities working in a tightly coordinated kitchen team, where they engaged in precise preparation routines and learned to maintain efficiency in every kitchen related task. They experienced a dynamic shift in thinking due to the vast differences in the Japanese kitchen and culture, when compared to the expectation they had of a New Zealand kitchen space. Both young men identified the development of "cultural insight" as a key takeaway.

Having developed a meaningful understanding of people from other parts of the globe meant that a robust foundation was established for Jonah's and Steve's future. Both interns had a clear understanding of their own personal culinary training and kitchen work ethics, but Steve explained how they both questioned their assumptions about the Japanese kitchen hierarchy and what constituted "outstanding" dishes. They simply examined why the system existed rather than thinking how different it was to the typical New Zealand restaurant kitchen. This perspective forms what can be identified as cultural identity. The interns recognised that the head chef did not just hold authority due to their position in the kitchen but, rather, out of a deep respect for their culture and experience working with the myriad of rich Japanese resources within the restaurant. Habashy and Cruz (2021) identify cultural humility as a lifelong journey of reflection, rather than one focussing on outcomes and the completion of tasks. What Jonah and Steve experienced, however, is the embracement of cultural humility where the focus shifts to processes and people.

Steve described the placement as "intense," noting that it prompted meaningful reflection on his own familial culture and personal values. This introspection led to a heightened appreciation for cultural diversity and a deeper respect for perspectives different from the participants' own. The contrast between traditional Māori cooking techniques—such as boil-up and hāngi—and the refined, intricate methods employed by the Japanese head chef further enriched their understanding of culinary practice. The head chef guiding them was unexpectantly receptive to the fascinating cooking techniques from New Zealand, enriching the experience for both graduates and hosts in a reciprocal way. Both participants reflected on how the opportunities they had on the Japan placement influenced their personal and professional development beyond what they thought would have occurred on a typical domestic placement. As Steve remarked:

> I think we only touched the surface when it comes to skills and knowledge gained not only in the kitchen, but in our daily lives. I experienced so many moments that I found confronting, really pushing my limit a few times in many areas. I gained a lot of personal growth from these challenging times, and I don't feel I would've got this if I had stayed in New Zealand.

The shift in perspective, prompted by the challenges both interns encountered, opened new avenues for growth and contributed significantly to the evolution of their self-concept and professional identity.

Steve exclaims, "The sheer pace of service in a high-pressure Tokyo kitchen was an adjustment. Precision knife skills and lightning-fast plating were essential." Beyond technical skills, the new graduates discovered a whole new approach to food presentation. The meticulous attention to detail, the respect for seasonality, and the emphasis on creating an artistic experience on the plate were revelations to them both, not only as new chefs but also as cultural outsiders. These gems of new experiences kept the recent graduates engaged, consistently adapting to their new environment and contributing to the expansion of their sense of identity. Steve remarked on his return how there had been so much effort expended in trying to make the food look as natural as possible, a hallmark of Japanese cuisine: "Plating was such an art, but there was emphasis on making it look like no effort had been made, even though there was." Steve continues, "It was a constant learning experience, figuring out how the flavours would work together, everything is so precise." Highlights for Jonah, meanwhile, were experiencing raw chicken, preparing milk-fed lamb, and working with numerous ingredients that were previously unheard of back in New Zealand. There was also a strong emphasis on using plant-based ingredients, which the head chef asserted 'elevates' the dishes. This cross-cultural exposure may have cultivated valuable insights, such as determining the significance of hospitality (manaakitanga), revealing meaningful parallels between Japanese culinary principles and traditional Māori culture.

CHALLENGES

The year wasn't without its challenges. The fast-paced Tokyo kitchen demanded a level of efficiency and communication that Jonah and Steve had not quite anticipated. "The language structure is similar," they exclaimed, noticing that the vowels were very much the same in both Māori and Japanese languages. "There were language barriers to overcome, of course," said Steve, "but also cultural differences in how a kitchen operates. After having spent two years studying culinary skills in our programme, it still took a while to adjust to the strict etiquette that is evident in a Japanese kitchen environment." Even the seemingly straightforward task of sharpening their knives revealed significant differences in their training methods. Askren and James (2021) argue that students often believe the programme curriculum will prepare them for work in their chosen industry, but that several important skills required in business are missing: self-confidence, a strong work ethic, and adequate social skills, to name a few. In the interns' case, the language barrier and the emotional challenge of not wanting to offend anyone, proved to be major, additional hurdles. Deciphering unfamiliar ingredients and navigating the hierarchy of a Japanese kitchen demanded quick learning and cultural sensitivity, aspects of the work not so obvious in their training facilities in New Zealand. The sheer pace of service in a high-pressure Tokyo kitchen needed adjusting to.

The initial cultural barriers were steep, according to Steve, and the language presented a constant challenge even though one brother had learned Japanese for four years at school. Steve and Jonah both confirmed on return from their Japan placement that the environment they had been immersed in had had a profound impact on their self-worth. They were forced to negotiate many challenges throughout their time in Tokyo and, in turn, progressed to pushing the boundaries at times. According to Cullen (2010), the stimulation of boundary crossing can assist in developing a student's identity as a learner. Having to conform to a different culture along with a new language develops into a transition period before the student or newcomer finally reaches a stage where the experience has given them the opportunity to develop a certain level of intelligence that aids in promoting self-confidence.

For the graduates, cultural immersion extended beyond the kitchen. The pair had to adjust to Japanese social norms, such as bowing as a greeting and respecting personal space, which differed from those they were accustomed to in their own cultures. Navigating the bustling metropolis of Tokyo with its different customs and etiquette demanded another layer of adaptation. Paying their rent in cash every week, comparatively lower wages, and working in environments with up to 90 percent humidity were significant adjustments for these young men. Being exposed to a culturally distinct and more professionally and personally challenging environment, in contrast to a placement in New Zealand, played a significant role in enhancing their capacity to handle stressful situations. Koyama (2020) highlights the enrichment interns experience regardless of language barriers as being profound, including personal growth in areas such as maturity, tolerance, patience, and self-confidence. Professionally, the graduates developed their adaptability and resilience, learning to perform under pressure in a fast-paced environment. Personally, they uncovered new facets of their identity, finding a balance between cultural pride and embracing the need to change and become innovative.

DISCUSSION

Interviews with the participants, the head chef, and the restaurant owner, revealed key components contributing to the students' growth and cultural adaptation during their overseas work placements. Post interviews revealed that both students experienced perceived language gains, in particular in listening comprehension. "Ideally, we both should've learned more key phrases in Japanese before we went," admitted Steve. The restaurant owner stated that the main issues faced by himself and the head chef were related to the graduates being 'work ready.' There was an assumption that because these brothers were recent graduates, they would possess the necessary skills required to start working effectively in any commercial kitchen. However, both possessed minimal experience working in any kitchen in New Zealand, let alone in a foreign country, which proved to be a challenge in adapting quickly to a new professional culinary environment.

Following instruction from the head chef was an integral skill according to the restaurant owner. "The boys just needed to listen and repeat then repeat again and again—no need to use your fresh ideas just yet," he stated. "Perhaps we needed to be tougher on the consequences of not following instructions when asked?" There is a delicate balance between providing constructive guidance and correcting employees, however. In support of this, a 2022 study of 27 students in the hospitality industry in South Africa showed a clear correlation between de-motivators and whether the students were likely to stay in the industry (Mqwebedu et al., 2022). Post-internship interviews, however, revealed that both graduates perceived positive outcomes, even when they faced first time challenges. They claimed that they maintained their Māori roots but were open to adopting elements of Japanese kitchen culture and food preparation which conveys how identities can by dynamic and multi-layered.

Supporting the findings of this research, Vo et al. (2021) define an internship or the like as a three-way partnership between the educational institute involved, the students, and the organisation receiving them. There are benefits for each party. In this case, the restaurant owner and his chef discovered how to train graduates more effectively while the institute earned recognition for facilitating a successful educational exchange. The students in this study have benefited from their internships as they have gained transferable skills and developed a strong link

between theory and practical knowledge. The significant range of cross-cultural experiences has reshaped their professional philosophy, teaching them to work with new ingredients and technique, contributing to their ongoing advancement as chefs.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to explore the perspectives of hospitality graduates experiencing a first-time sojourn overseas in a work environment. Results revealed that by the end of their twelve months abroad, both brothers were not just graduate chefs, they were seasoned travellers with broadened horizons. They returned to New Zealand with a newfound appreciation for their own culinary heritage, forever changed by the precision, the flavours, and the detail that went into every service. Their year in Japan was not just about mastering new skills; it was about cultural exchange, personal growth, and pushing the boundaries. Both stated that although they showed respect for the local culture and tried to learn and understand as much as they could absorb, they both underestimated their 'readiness.' "It took me at least three months to become familiar with the expectation of my job in the kitchen. There was a lot of frustration on both sides," they both agreed.

The experience has undoubtedly become a cornerstone of their culinary careers. They now approach food with a global perspective, their dish ideas reflecting the fusion of Kiwi ingenuity, Māori traditions, and Japanese precision, a testament to their transformative year in the heart of Tokyo. From the owner's perspective, as he begins a year with another graduate from the same class in Tauranga, he has learned some important takeaways: "In future, I will put more emphasis on getting the students to repeat some of the kitchen skills instructed by the head chef." Understanding the complexities faced by new graduates working abroad provides an appreciation for the resilience required to cope with these challenges. This, in turn, can pave the way for future graduates considering a similar excursion and for educators who are part of these participants' journeys. The findings of this research also highlight the importance of supporting students throughout their experience, with particular emphasis on pre-departure preparation to help prevent culture shock.

For graduates venturing into the professional kitchen, the learning curve is steep. But for those who take the leap across the globe, the challenges multiply. Since this study was exploratory, future research could employ qualitative methods to explore in greater depth how hospitality graduates form their perceptions and expectations, and how these influence their career decisions. The ongoing relationship between the restaurant owner and researcher will be a source of extended contacts through the team of employees working at the establishment as well as the myriads of international contacts the owner has within his circle. The opportunity exists to build positive relationships between the faculty staff and international industry operators as well as to increase awareness of the different cultures of the parties involved. Collectively, these benefits have helped the development of a valuable professional network for participating students, enhancing their prospects of securing full-time employment in their respective fields. The transformation these two young men in particular have experienced has enabled them to view themselves not only as chefs, but also as cultural representatives, shaping their vision to blend universal influences with the rich heritage of Māori cuisine. The experience has also allowed them to test and refine their skills, build confidence, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the culinary industry. These research findings more broadly will help to leverage improvements for future students should the practice become formalised and alleviate the challenges of executing a formal internship.

Declaration of interest statement

I declare that the information above, is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. As the author and team tutor of the graduates, I have a memorandum of understanding with the restaurant Rangitoto Tokyo that the placement of students is not for commercial gains. The research was undertaken with the approval of the Human Ethics Committee of the institution at which I teach, Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology. To protect participant privacy, pseudonyms have replaced the graduates' actual names, with their consent.

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"HOW HAVE YOU TRANSFORMED?" WHAT FEATURES OF PRACTICE DOCTORAL JOURNEYS BRING ABOUT TRANSFORMATION?

Martin Andrew, Steve Henry and Jeremy Taylor

INTRODUCTION

The fact that transformative learning lends itself to work-based and work-integrated learning at postgraduate levels continues to attract attention (Costley & Fulton, 2018). The concepts of individual and professional transformation, resulting from systematic and critical reflection on prior learning and experience, can be understood as lying at the heart of professional practice research. Hence, a process of learning-for-becoming accompanies any such candidate journey. Learners draw on such models as Wilcock's (1999) occupation-centred model of doing, being, becoming, and belonging, which conceptualises professional identity as situated, evolving, and deeply relational. Becoming denotes how people redefine their values and rethink their priorities to prepare for transformation into new roles and fresh ways of understanding themselves and their capacities as practitioners. Here, we contend that professional practice journeys learners in Capable New Zealand's 8-year-old Doctor of Professional Practice programme (DProfPrac) experience moments of transformation, realisation, and positive change. What happens, we contend, aligns with Mezirow's (1991) theoretical reflective-change-action process and creates learning possibilities beyond andragogy to foster supported and negotiated yet self- determined learning journeys for adult professionals (Taylor, 2007).

Candidates on the DProfPrac become aware of their changing practices—as practitioners and as researchers—through the reflective methods within the programme's heutagogical structure. What Mezirow (1991) termed "perspective transformation" is a desired outcome of the DProfPrac's signature facilitative, heutagogical mentoring. The programme's design suits experienced professionals drawing on their own practice journeys to generate new knowing for themselves and others (Lester & Costley, 2010) and, moreover, from workplaces where others may also benefit from their change-focussed learning (Costley, 2010). That the programme is transformative is echoed in personal communications with programme monitors: "Learners and recent graduates commented on the transformational nature of their learning and the high degree of relevance of the DPP study to their professional development and their work" (personal communication, 2024, quoted with permission). Two such learner practitioners power the evidence set used in this study, which asks: what affordances of mentored doctoral journeys bring about transformation; or, in short, what transforms?

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

This study not only casts light on transformative 'becoming' in doctoral contexts; it also contributes to emergent methodologies. The study opens out two methods of enquiry. Firstly, our methodological innovation employs dialectic, conversation, and speaking as a form of reflection both in and on experiential learning. Secondly, this innovation, in turn, parallels writing as a method of enquiry (Richardson, 1990). We call this method dialectical autoethnography, mining evidence from authentic and contextualised conversations about practice. Hence, we

maintain, the evidence set at the heart of this paper is itself informed by theories of transformative learning with which the learners, as educators themselves, are fully familiar (Mezirow, 1991, 2000, 2009, 2012). This means a two-learner 'live' interview comprises this study's "evidence," otherwise known as 'data' (Denzin, 2013), implementing a small-scale empirical methodology. With Denzin's (2019) vision of practice research articulating utopian transformation in mind, we believe our identification of transformative traits in the learning process points to what Denzin, like ourselves, views as hope in a post-neoliberalist age where learning has become perfunctorily instrumental.

The affordances of holding the potential to transform and enabling moments of becoming are characteristic of postgraduate heutagogy in professional contexts. We can attribute these characteristics to professional doctoral heutagogy's strong emphasis on, firstly, self-determination as an aspect of transformation (Hase & Kenyon, 2013) and, secondly, the potential transformativity of such heutagogy (Blaschke & Hase, 2016; Mann et al., 2017). Within such enquiry-led educative contexts, professional research propels "the power to be transformative at the institutional, communal, interpersonal, and individual levels" (Ravitch, 2014). It also allows for and affords multiple lenses as part of the critical (re)envisaging of practice so that, for instance, insider perspectives can be supported or triangulated by real and imagined external views (Evered & Louis, 1981). A further purpose of this article is to open out heutagogy for professional practice as a potentially transformational method of collaborative research with the learner increasingly aware that they are the expert.

Procedurally, the paper both demonstrates (through data in action) and considers (through critical contextualisation of the responses) how a transformative heutagogy for practice doctorate leverages reflective practice (Rodgers, 2022), understanding of the role of reflexivity in researcher positioning (Taylor et al., 2023). Such work also requires unpacking loaded but powerful organisational and political language and acts of languaging, or being metacognitively aware how language is selected in action within a critically reflective process (Andrew, 2024b). It also means being open to the iterative and the emergent as key affordances of best practice in such professional learning contexts (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008; Leavy, 2011).

KOTAHITANGA

As best local practice, heutagogical mentoring in an Aotearoa / New Zealand context is an enactment of kotahitanga—solidity, togetherness and collective action (Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa, 2024). It reveals what is possible when mentors' and learners' visions and purposes converge in unity so that research becomes meaningful action that reshapes worldviews and transforms perspectives, and hence affords the professional learner chances to realise their capacity to act as a change agent (Simsek, 2012).

Heutagogical mentoring also enacts Freire's idea that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (1970, p. 72). It is a subject the first author has discussed in detail in a study of how "mentoring" not "supervision" describes these educators' teaching and learning interventions: "'mentoring' is an authentic term for heutagogical strategies that occur during negotiated transdisciplinary professional practice research journeys and that have positive impacts on developing identities" (Andrew, 2024a, p. 23). Those impacts, we argue in the current study, can be encompassed by the terms "transformation" and "transformativity."

TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSFORMATIVITY

Transformation, a desired change outcome from learning, and transformativity, the inbuilt and scaffolded affordances of learning designed to lead to transformation, lie at the heart of the work of Jack Mezirow. Transformative learning theory, strongly grounded in constructivism, communicative action, and emancipatory critiques of learning (such as those of Freire and Habermas), famously appeared in 1978 as a ten-phase process

beginning, as professional practice does, with a Dewian disorienting dilemma (Dewey, 1944). This was a workplace puzzle, a curiosity to explore and sometimes an experience-based hunch, leading to what Mezirow (1991) called perspective transformation. By this time, Mezirow had identified a key component of the evolving theory, seeing transformation as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (1996, p. 162). This was a version of the theory ready for the "Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous" (VUCA) world (Barber, 1992).

Seen by Mezirow always as a process rather than an *a priori* prescription, transformative learning follows key stages. Refining or elaborating our meaning schemes (that is, our existing frames of reference) leads to learning new meaning schemes (best understood as new frames of reference). In turn, transforming meaning schemes (which at this stage can be seen as habits of mind) leads to a process of transforming meaning perspectives or points of view (Mezirow, 1999, p. 49).

The communicative aspect of Mezirow's theory, rather than the instrumentalist aspects, powers what we regard here as transformativity. The communicative theme was most likely channelled via Habermas's (1990) critical idea of public communicative action, a notion prefiguring the idea of practitioner researcher as activist, potentially transforming opportunity for themselves and their communities (Costley, 2010). Communicative action also involves the kinds of designs for learning Grocott (2022) upholds as unlearning old practices and methods while embracing fresh ones, (re)designing and (re)creating them in the process as part of a vision for perspective shifting and hence transformative change. Through the (re)creative humanisation and democratisation of the learning journey, communicative channels open out, and it is these channels that transform those who communicate and their communities, affording the emancipatory and hence agentive impetus of Habermas's conceptualisation.

In 2009, responding to views that his theory was overly cognitive and not sufficiently agentive, Mezirow re-construed transformative learning as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change" (p. 22). This is his most finely wrought definition of transformative learning, and the closest conceptualisation to the one we draw upon in the study. Mezirow died (in 2014) before the VUCA world of supercomplexity yielded to the BANI—"Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear and Incomprehensible" (Casico, 2020)—universe of wicked problems. These adjectives seem to describe both our post-truth current reality and Denzin's (2019) post-neoliberalist epistemology. This is the world of today's learners' disorienting dilemmas and, moreover, wicked problems. Ours are times beyond those of what Barnett (2004) called "encountering strangeness ... wrestling with it and ... forming one's own responses to it" (p. 257) to (en)counter an unknown future.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is methodologically a praxical Socratic dialogue between an academic mentor, or supervisor, and two learners at the submission stage of their thetic journeys. It can be called dialectical autoethnography. The methods of the creation and presentation of evidence are potentially Socratic in that the praxis of our presentation engages with *aporia* (doubt and ambiguity) and *ethics* (critical morality) as well as a regard for co-negotiated constructivist situated knowledge (Grondin, 2018). It is praxical in that it explores a research: practice nexus with reflectivity as a link.

As collaborators leveraging kotahitanga, we wanted to adopt and adapt a methodology that was dialogic, praxical and Socratic; emergent and generative while drawing solidly on empirical artefacts of our conversational journeys. We adopted Salo et al.'s (2024) Schönian position on learning in and for practice in that both solidarity and awareness of becoming are consolidated within such praxical interactions. Put more simply, the conversational aspect of this method of evidence captures reflection-in-action within a Mezirovian worldview, also affording a verbal and performative mode of expression suited to one conversant who is neurodivergent.

The bases of the study are ethics approved (Otago Polytechnic #HRE15-173, 2020 and #1038, 2024) and the learner/coauthor voices used with their approval.

The research addresses the question in our title and those described below. The work aims to explore facets of transformational change in theory as they play out in experienced reality. The evidence set, to draw on Denzin's epistemology (2013, 2019), is an edited transcription of a three-person interview. The interview took place in a real-life setting in real time and in an authentic context: the OPSITARA conference held in Christchurch, New Zealand in December 2024. The mentor interviewed the completing learners about the theme of experiencing and documenting transformation as they experienced it on their doctoral journeys, with an emphasis on reflectivity, reflexivity, autonomy, and agency. The discussion emerged in a conversation pivoting on three guiding questions suggested in advance by the participants as we planned the research event:

1. What has been the biggest transformative moment of your candidature?
2. What are some of the biggest challenges you faced when completing qualifications in a workplace setting, and how did you overcome them?
3. How does the self-directed learning structure of the DPP programme empower learners to take ownership of their research and practice?

The transcription was generated with Otter.ai and revised collaboratively. We now move to a version of the conversation edited from a raw transcript into what Denzin (2013, 2019) would consider an evidence set.

EVIDENCE SET

Martin: How have you transformed during your doctoral journey?

Steve: I've had to get over my own bullshit, is the short answer. But I've become a much more critically reflective practitioner, so I've managed to see biases that I could not see before, and I've mapped them. I've played with my inner voices around meaning-making, and I realised I was [making meaning]. I had a 'clever hero' persona. Originally, I really wanted to save the marginalised. And then, of course, I realised I was the marginalised. That's why I related. Then I realised I had a 'rebel' persona that wanted to burn the place to the ground and have change. And that's why I was constantly in change—a series of realisations, each with their own voice. I soothed those voices and have assisted them and used that energy to conform. I never thought I'd do such a thing, and it's outrageous to me, but here I am: submitted therefore conformed. The other really important thing for me is I came to understand the value of shutting up. Because when I got into the literature, I realised how little I knew and I thought I knew a whole lot. So those are pretty big realisations and shifts for me.

Jeremy: I've arrived at the end, knowing I don't know a lot. I think that's probably where I've come to, and I think that's ultimately the most impactful part of the journey to impostership and that's probably something we relate to. Being 'in academia' and practitioners, we sometimes meet people in the context of feeling like, "How am I here? Why am I here?", and "What am I doing here?" And I think that's also part of the transformation. Needing to be comfortable when you speak, that you do have something valuable to say, but be open to the fact that there's people who know a lot more than you on this topic. And I think about this idea of 'criticality'; that's a word I wasn't comfortable with, but it's nonetheless an important one on the journey. We just need to be continually evaluating our own assumptions, biases, and position.

Martin: And the biggest challenges you faced and how you overcame them?

Jeremy: I'll start off with the biggest challenge. And I think this is a personal one—being asked to be resilient. And I know that's an overused word, but really this is this journey where you're going to be challenged and you just

have to keep going. And I know we're all in academia or practitioners; therefore, that's something we say, but that's been the biggest challenge to learn—something that I tell everybody else: to learn and to deal with that. I think the other challenge is having to be creative in the space, which is all around workplace learning and impact. So my instance was, "Well, how am I going to get funding for the project?" Because there';s not a lot of money at the moment. It's got worse, actually, unfortunately, but you've got to frame what you're doing as valuable in applications. I think we've all got a story that's there, and just to look where funding can be sourced to carry you through. Challenge three is when you're working with senior academics and this is back to impostership. You've sometimes just got to trust your judgment that you've got a worthwhile story to share. I think that's important to put across, because if you're working with eminent professors, you can sometimes be, "Wow, am I going to be able to come up with a convincing argument?" I think that's also something, and that's you've got to trust that it's your story. Therefore, the challenge is to persist.

Steve: My big challenges? The fact that I'm kind of an insider, insider researcher, and it's sometimes as if I am looking at the phenomena of transformational learning and becoming within vocational education as a response to complexities. That's my area of interest, because I do believe this linear, scaffolded curriculum stuff is not a wonderful way to adapt to complexity, because things change, right? Another challenge is that I'm a very visual learner. I think we privilege writing ridiculously in the academy, and I have produced a doctorate with 61 diagrams and 130 pages in a practitioner thesis. It's unconventional, so it's challenging. I've created a visual on the front page, and if you don't get it off the visual on the front page, then, well, there we are. I identify as neurodivergent, so I have challenges around [that] and I officially meet the criteria for disability in that my work is limited by my ability to write relative to [my abilities to] speak and draw. So therefore, how do I leverage that for good, rather than it being a bad thing? I've been rebellious about the over-privileging of writing. I use my rage to create spaces for learners just like me. That's what I've been doing all my life—attempting to have inclusion.

Martin: How does the knowledge that this is self-directed learning empower learners?

Steve: The answer is: incredibly. I have had the agency to design what has worked for me, and have mentors who are flexible enough to go, "Okay, that's how you're doing it. Okay, well, I haven't seen that before, but okay, give us the argument," and I've had the luxury of working with the mentors who I know and trust enough to be able to make myself vulnerable. So with that vulnerability has come huge motionality. Lisa Grocott says that transformational learning is cognitive, but also embodied, social, and emotional, and if we're not doing all three of those latter things, we have privileged the cognitive big time, right? And vocational education works so well because it's embodied for me, but with the emotional bit, so a lot of my work ended up being around how to navigate the internal world that goes on as a transformational learner. So yeah, the challenge has been to not go down the cul-de-sacs of psychology too much, which is focused on what's wrong.

Jeremy: I suspect I wouldn't be alone in here that many of us come from a background of teaching or practice or education, where we'e the experts or the control. That was my background in China, [and] coming back to New Zealand, I had to relearn the value of being able to give learner the agency and trust that the learner would be able to achieve something worthwhile. In our own domains, I can see how empowering self-directed learning can be as it gives the learner the ability to be able to sustain the interest to complete a project. Because if I didn't have the self-directed learning aspect of the project, I wouldn't have completed it here. It was just too difficult during COVID. There's just no way we could have done it. So that's something, I think is a takeaway to think about: how you can integrate more self-directed learning with your own learners.

DISCUSSION

The significance of the study lies in demonstrating the power of reflectivity as a multi-directional, reciprocity/ako-led strategy to understand adult learner transformation, enhance confidence in ongoing researcher autonomy,

and ultimately build future-focussed capability and agency. By means of this enquiry we (one mentor and two learners) explore self-directed learning, transformativity, and agency for learners, demonstrating how reflectivity and reflexivity enable learners to access fresh views of themselves as change agents and capable researchers. They may, in their professional lives, already be these things; the journey helps them understand and move beyond understanding into capability for agency. As such, we see transformation at individual and socio-professional levels, but we also ask what is it that leads to transformation in such programmes.

Through this enquiry, we also wonder how to build transformativity into our doctoral heutagogy as an enhanced understanding of one's capability for agency. These are some of the affordances of the doctoral agency we unpack from the conversation:

- Affording chances for sense-making by leveraging insights into becoming, belonging (such as to academic communities) and transforming (Andrew, 2024a);
- Collaborating in mentor-learner teams that embody kotahitanga so that out of solidarity come visions of capability and the potential for understanding one's own agency;
- Heeding chances to gain awareness of (un)conscious bias—criticality, positioning, understanding limitations (Mezirow, 2012)—and thinking through stale neoliberalised terms like "resilience" (Andrew, 2024b);
- Articulating opportunities to map out coming-to-know in life journeys as research paths (Grocott, 2022);
- Safely offering complete freedom for identity exploration, including a context where all learners, including neurodivergent and indigenous learners (for instance), leverage their distinctive ways of being and negotiate their ways of doing research;
- Situating learning for transformation in communities of being, belonging, being heard, or sites of shared practice (Wilcock, 1999);
- Allowing the self-directed openness to move from encountering disorienting dilemmas and their adjunct wicked problems to genuinely un-colonised 'innovation';
- Enabling inquiry from outside and inquiry from inside to allow alternative lenses to unpack and repack practice (Evered & Louis, 1981; Ravitsch, 2014), and
- Exploring not only 'canonical' territories but also 'liminal' places and allowing them to become apparent, even demarginalising them by recognising them as intrinsic to individual journeys.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The discussion at the heart of this study makes contributions to such aspects of work-based learning as how learners move towards agency through a transformative process of engaging with enquiry within a facilitated and mentored journey. The study, and its method, unveil what Ravitch (2014), in a context of describing praxis- led transformative enquiry, calls "voices yet unheard, knowledges yet unvalidated, ways of being yet unsupported" (p. 10). We hear imposters, rebels and not-so-clever heroes on the border of entry to the hallowed community of professional researchers; even realising that, to an extent, they had already belonged there. Becoming a researcher is not an act on trespass on to privileged ground, but an invitation to contribute reflected experience and knowing-in-action to transformative practice.

The study explored narratives learners completing a Doctor of Professional Practice degree, concluding that the process empowers learners with a future-focussed mindset and the capacity to be both a thought leader and a change maker within their communities. The two learner voices articulate heutagogical practice that triggers

transformation and both speak of the affordances of their mentoring experience as impacting capability and transformation, with self-direction enabling agency. We see also that conscious sharing of kotahitanga enables a learning journey powered by reflective practice and critical reflexivity. As such, the paper links the affordances of quality work-based learning delivery in doctoral education with both personal and work-based impacts.

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ETHICAL BECOMING: MAPPING THE DEMANDS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE RESEARCH

Sam Mann, Ruth Myers and Glenys Forsyth

INTRODUCTION

Ethics matters. We all agree. But what does this mean for our practices, our research, and our contributions to supporting better worlds? How do we navigate the complex, blurry, undisclosed, unanticipated, unthought, and unthinkable? How are 'we' as researcher and practitioner situated, now, and now again; that is, how does our ethical thinking and being—our ethical becoming—inform our practice worlds, and more broadly? How do we know if we are helping, or what is care? Whose agenda are we serving? Are we the right person to be doing the work? What if when, knowing the wrongness of something, we choose not to act? This is by no means simple work.

These are living inquiries. Our research practice is our practice. Our practitioners declare, "if I wasn't doing this study, I would be doing it anyway." What guides us in the complexity of ethical demands when research is not separated out from ourselves, our communities, our practice contexts, or our futures? How, as we develop new professional frameworks of practice—our new professional and personal identities—does this incorporate an ethical maturity, an ethical becoming?

Our autoethnographic, necessarily insider research requires integrity and courage, and for research to remain firmly rooted in our everyday practices, as well as shifts across contexts, and plurality of meanings. We need to be able to 'hold on,' as we surf the edge of chaos, develop our own methods, and our ethical thinking, knowing, and being. This article explores the ethical demands of Professional Practice research and suggests that a more expansive process than conventional ethics approval is required to encompass ethical becoming.

The article is shared as a discussion between three CapableNZ Otago Polytechnic colleagues, drawing on previous research and experience supporting ākonga in their learning journeys. Alongside the authors, the voices of colleagues and Otago Polytechnic doctoral alumni, as well as researchers and practitioners from the wider field, share and contribute to the work underway to situate ethical becoming as integral to Professional Practice research.

We put forward the view that ethical demands are complex and emergent, encompassing interwoven domains of ethical self, research ethics, and professional ethics. Specific approaches ākonga take to navigating conventional ethics are visualised and the impacts of these approaches discussed. We then share an initial conceptual framing to support an emergent and agential ethical becoming.

Our other papers on Professional Practice provide background context to ethical demands as complex, emergent, and unique. They cover areas such as transformation (Mann & Bull, 2020); self-determined, complex, and collaborative work (Mann & Malcolm, 2022); necessarily insider positionality (Mann, Myers, & Guruge, 2024), and our need to develop our own methods (Mann, Myers, Guruge, & Hawkins, 2024).

In a second article, "Ethical Becoming: An Alternative Ethics Framework for Professional Practice Research" (Mann et al., 2025) a support process is practically encapsulated as an "Ethical Licence." Situated within the context of the Otago Polytechnic Professional Practice doctorate, the Ethical Licence aims to ensure an elevated ethical awareness and support a shift from ethics conceived as compliance to a journey of ethical becoming. Critical evaluative questions focused on key ethical themes are proposed to frame and support ongoing and emergent responses throughout Professional Practice Research, encouraging an ongoing maturity in our ethical becoming.

Let's begin.

DISCUSSION

Sam: Glenys, as ethicist for Capable NZ's Professional Practice programme at Otago Polytechnic, do you want to start? What do you see is the problem?

Glenys: Absolutely. In my Master of Professional Practice, I examined ethics within Professional Practice and developed an ethics as practice model that considers ethical self and researcher responsibility. One of my motivations for this was that the experienced mentors I talked with had identified a disconnect between a person's understanding of their ethical self and their ethical responsibilities as a researcher.

Ruth: Just wondering, what is an ethical self?

Glenys: Good question, Ruth. You could check out Tolich and Tumily's *Finding Your Ethical Research Self* (2021) to get a really good understanding but, in essence, we can think about our ethical self as how we are in the world—our moral understanding and intuitions—that is, sensing when something feels wrong or right. And also, what we do when we recognise an ethical dilemma or concern—how we draw upon our ethical imagination, and reflection processes to think it through and develop responses. And our integrity and courage to act on this.

Ruth: Ok, thanks. I can see how our ethical practice draws upon our ethical self, and that this is a process, involving ongoing reflection, who we are, and how we are.

Glenys: We hold ethical agency in this. We need to, to be able to respond to ethical dilemmas as they emerge in our everyday—the complex issues, situated, in the moment, and unexpected.

Ruth: Hmmm, so our ongoing learning deepens our contextualised ethical understanding.

Sam: And our ākonga embed this ethical self in their Professional Framework of Practice.

Ruth: So, perhaps we could argue—and I am probably jumping ahead—foregrounding our ethical self and our ethical becoming is a contribution of Professional Practice research. It embeds insights, innovations, and new ways of knowing and being in wider communities of practice. That is, our ethical becoming shifts grounds.

Glenys: Yes. And in terms of shifting, we need to shift how we think about research ethics. One of the big issues we face is the inappropriateness of the medical model review process of ethics for social research. There are significant impacts to restricting our ethical thinking to the procedural. These concerns are not unique to Professional Practice. Lots of research agrees with us.

Sam: Like the New Brunswick Declaration (Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014). They put together a declaration, hoping to help shift ethics from compliance to professional codes of ethical practice.

Glenys: There was a follow-up conference here in Dunedin in 2015 focused on Ethics in Practice and Māori Consultation (Gontcharov & MacDonald, 2016). Researchers were not happy; they were calling for more expansive

thinking about ethics, including "embedded" approaches (p. 66). They were worried about the increasing gaps between procedural ethics and ethics in practice, and "ethics creep" (Haggerty, 2004, p. 59).

Ruth: Creep meaning ethical governance in academic research has been broadening its reach and scope of control (Haggerty, 2004). Back to the Declaration, what did they come up with? Can you remember? Perhaps have a quick look now?

Glenys: One step ahead of you. Here they are, the New Brunswick-Otago Declaration articles: "Culture of Trust; Collectivities and Individuals; Professional Self-governance; Ethical Pluralism and Broad Governance; Experiential Learning; Bridges between Ethics Committees and Researchers; Freedom of Expression; Evidence-Based Ethics; Consultative Governance; Research Beyond Academia"; and lastly a commitment to ongoing development of these ideas (Gontcharov & MacDonald, 2016, pp. 66–67). We are not the first in identifying a need for change.

Ruth: The current arrangements see Professional Practice learners completing an institutional ethics review process. Which is why we are talking here: we know that current formal ethics processes do not adequately attend to Professional Practice research—and, more than that, the wrong questions asked at the wrong time result in murky waters and possibly less-than-ethical outcomes.

Sam, speaking slowly: Just to be clear, in raising this issue, we are not questioning the level of rigour or scrutiny. Rather, ethical becoming is an increased focus on ethical practice and ethical Professional Practice research. And we raise the question of what an institutional ethical process might look like that better supports Professional Practice research.

Ruth: So, what are some of the ethical demands in Professional Practice research? Sam, want to give us a quick run down from some of the work you have been doing?

Sam: Sure. Ethics in our space is complex, emergent, and unique. Professional Practice research focuses on transformation, change, and innovation, and our journeys are self-determined, complex, and collaborative. We are necessarily insiders, situated in a swamp of practice (Schön, 1995), where we are immersed in unnavigated but pressing terrains. I describe this as surfing on the edge of chaos, where research convention often falters or constrains us, and we find ourselves needing to develop our own methods.

Glenys: Adding to this Professional Practice research spans a multitude of contexts, requiring transdisciplinary and, innovative and potentially transgressive approaches to effect change (Costley, 2018). And, as researchers, we are not objective value-free experts in this (Costley and Pizzolato, 2018). Rather, our insider positionality, as you have just shared, Sam, is paramount, and includes an "ethics that prioritises values and utility" (Costley, 2018, p. 28).

Ruth: And we need to be careful, because conventional ethics can hamper us, constraining and isolating the topic so that it loses the essence of practice.

Sam: In Professional Practice it has long been understood that much learning comes from challenging situations in the work environment. But, as we know, much of the benefit of Professional Practice research comes from unexpected areas in people's lived experience, including experiences such as racism in employment or the emotional aspects of living through a disaster. These areas could be researched through carefully targeted study design (say, protocols for interviewing drug addicts) but such structured approaches belie the necessarily fluid nature of Professional Practice in the real world. Rather than a specific research question about drug addiction, the Professional Practice learner is more likely to have a goal of improving organisational culture, and only later does it become apparent that drug misuse is present—and is just one of a myriad of intersecting issues across the organisation. An ethical approach is needed to allow learning in areas where angels fear to tread.

Ruth: Yes, and this work needs to be done. As Norman Denzin reminds us, "Qualitative research scholars have an obligation to change the world, to engage in ethical work that makes a positive difference" (2024, p. 7). So we have to (said more loudly) engage in ethical work that makes a positive difference.

Glenys: And, we know, here at Capable, we do. Recent doctorates in Professional Practice exemplify ethical becoming through transformative, relational, and decolonising research. Each raises challenging ethical questions not well addressed by conventional research ethics processes. Sam, you have two here.

Sam: In *Becoming Tangata Tiriti,* Dave Hursthouse (2024) approaches ethics not as a procedural obligation, but as an ongoing, relational, and reflexive commitment deeply entwined with his professional identity. He grapples with the complexities of autoethnography … Here we go: "the challenge of informed consent within autoethnographic inquiry—especially boundary-less inquiry like this one" (p. 230). He goes on to say how this ambiguity impacted his writing and relationships. This led him to explore "pre-ethics" —a concept that required him to "situate [him] self in a relational field of accountability and collaboration from the very start of a research project" (p. 97). Through the development of *He Ripo*, an ethical practice framework inspired by kaupapa Māori and Indigenous research ethics, Dave reframes ethical practice as "a professional journey of becoming tangata tiriti" (p. 243), foregrounding community-led engagement and the enduring moral responsibilities of practice beyond research.

Ruth: I see that reflecting a deep commitment to what he calls "sensuous ethics" (p. 96)—attending to past, present, and relational consequences of practice as an ongoing ethical endeavour.

Sam: I've got Ray O'Brien's *Leadership by Learning Design* here as well. He treats ethics not just as procedural compliance, but as a practice of ethical becoming—a relational, evolving responsibility embedded in identity and leadership. While he talks about formal requirements like consent forms, his deeper stance is that ethics must be, he states, "situated, responsive, and informed by humility and learning" (2022, p. 14). He discusses his Professional Practice thesis as "the integration of decades of being inquisitive, grabbing opportunities for learning, and practice focused on doing the right thing" (p. vi). Ethics, for O'Brien, is about doing the right thing in *context*, not just following rules.

Ruth: What about when, as Ellis (2007) suggests, a decision may be made not to publish at all? Ethically, we need to accept this. That's similar to our whole argument here, we need to be mindful that institutional approaches don't impose, discipline, colonialise. So, what's good about the conventional approach, Glenys?

Glenys: Research ethics provides useful guidance for considering potential harm, privacy, and vulnerabilities for certain methods such as interviews and surveys.

Ruth: And its limits as you see them?

Glenys: Well, deeper embedded ethical thinking is required in Professional Practice, involving the ethical self both agentially and transformatively.

Ruth: Building on that, perhaps we can borrow a phrase from our colleagues Henk Roodt and Steve Henry's work around "agency as a relational and temporal achievement" (personal communication, June 10, 2025). We would agree I think, that ethical becoming sits exactly here. Ethical agency as a momentary, yet long, now.

Sam: Henk mentioned that the other day, how conventional ethics can be seen as, in his words, "a procedural agency thief" (personal communication, April 2025) that does not attend to the transformational, to becoming agential, one of our central outcomes of Professional Practitioner research, of ethical becoming …

All together: … ethical becoming requires ethical agency.

Sam: Another one of our main concerns is how our current approaches can break or dislocate the research. The literature describes processes of ethics for insider research that make a distinction between participating in the research and being in the research environment. People in the environment may not be able to opt out of the research environment (say the workplace), but they must be able to opt out of the research.

Glenys: It is easy to think of examples of this.

Sam: Yes, say if I was eating lunch in the staffroom and overheard colleagues ranting negatively about a new business initiative, this might be insightful and useful for my research, but I could not just write it down quoting the speaker. My colleagues would need to know I was doing research and that what they said informally would be protected. A fundamental rule is that ethics must not be retrospective; hence, if I wanted to use that information, I would have to invite that person to an interview and hope they said it again. But even knowing I was there, potentially using for research whatever conversations I heard, could fundamentally change the workplace and relationships within it.

Glenys: However, this can become problematic when either the research environment or the topic is not conducive to the usual ethics of insider research—for example, participants who are unable to give informed consent.

Sam: A variation on this we have experienced is the owner of a business stating that a learner's project was fundamental to the direction of the business. Under no circumstances, in his view, should there be any hint that his staff were able to opt out of that project, including the surveys used to understand the staff's current position on the initiative. These he considered a normal part of business, not some 'opt-outable' abstraction. Another variation is research involving reflection on past trauma—it would be inappropriate to have to seek consent from an abusive ex-partner. Ellis (2007) writes about exactly this case.

Ruth: This brings us to the confusion over what you need to seek institutional ethics approval for.

Sam: From an outsider, experimental research perspective, this is easy—everything that you would not be doing anyway needs to go through institutional ethics. This gets blurred when the research is observational, blurred more for insider research, and extremely murky when the researcher is undertaking necessarily insider Professional Practice research. Everything the latter researcher does is what they do as a practitioner. For example, let's say my 'research' is applying an Agile mindset across the business, and my 'data' is my reflection on everything that happens around me, does that mean my entire operation of my business needs institutional ethical approval? No, that would be silly—and next to impossible if my business involved children, animals, or was even morally uncomfortable such as in Tech4bad (Brooks et al., 2023). The clue is that the normal operation of the business, even a change programme, is business as usual, and not subject to ethics. But that leaves me with nothing to seek ethics for. In this situation, the Professional Practice researcher, with an institutional requirement to seek ethics, may invent an ethics-inducing event—say, a survey —solely for the purposes of having something to write on an institutional ethics form. And thus, the sacrificial survey leaves entirely unquestioned any ethical questions in the real practice research.

Ruth: Sam, these drawings you are doing help us understand what's going on in current practice. Can you talk us through them?

Sam: OK, this one is a simplified representation of the three domains, and their ethical effects, in Professional Practice ethics. We have the researcher and their ethical self, Professional Practice and its accompanying professional ethics, and research and—here, I have changed from a circle to a square to emphasise its awkward fit—research ethics.

Figure 1. Domains in Professional Practice ethics.

Ruth: Hmm, so how would these Professional Practice ethics domains and ethical effects be in practice, ideally?

Sam: Well, let's see. I think something like this, (drawing three circles, nearly on top of each other). Here the reality of these domains is being close to fully integrated and inseparable. I haven't shown the corresponding ethical aspects, but they are similarly overlapping.

Figure 2. Overlapping domains in Professional Practice ethics.

Glenys: Yet that's not how our ākonga are currently supported in approaching ethics.

Sam: Exactly. Because of that, ākonga find different ways to navigate an emphasis on conventional ethics. For starters, in this next drawing, the researcher is completely separated out, an outsider researcher. You can see how the research is treated as largely separate from practice and ignores professional ethics and ethics of self.

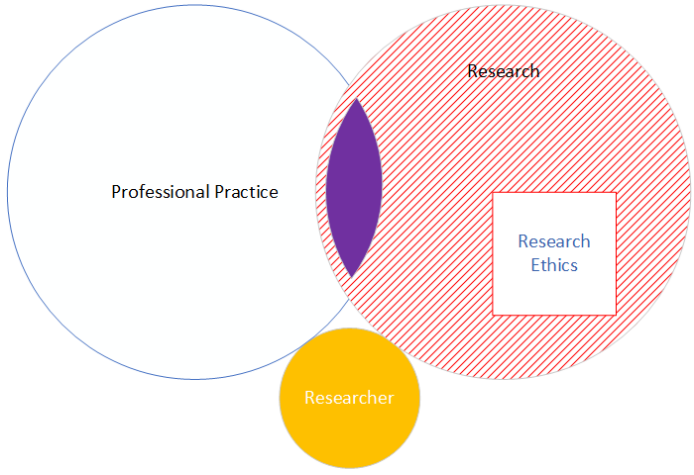

Figure 3. Research as separate.

Ruth: Yet we propose it is in the intertwining of our ethical practice, research, and self that our contributions, including our ethical becoming, emerge.

Sam: And sometimes, even when the insider nature of Professional Practice research is accepted, this is seen as problematic. Here, the research ethics process completely misses the challenging questions of ethics in research practice.

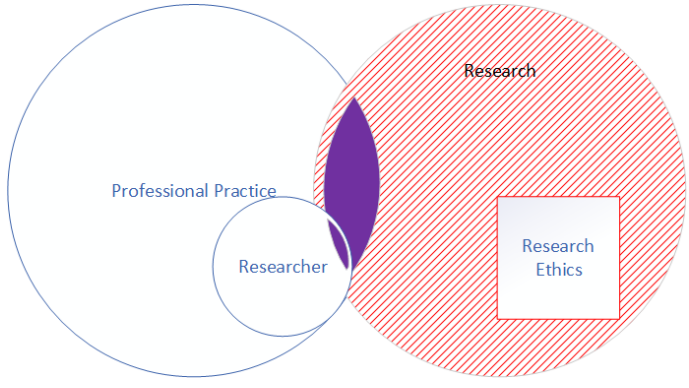

Figure 4. Insider problematic.

Glenys: Hardly helpful.

Sam: Another attempt to solve this is to frame the research, and hence practice, in a way that is amenable to research ethics. This fifth drawing shows how this can become a study imposed on practice, rather than a study of practice.

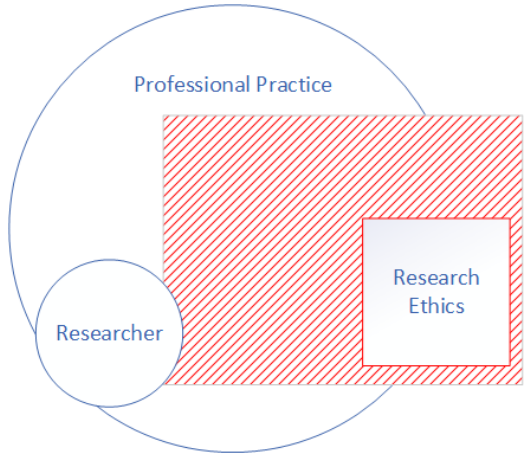

Figure 5. Imposed on practice.

Ruth: But that's extremely limiting and ill-fitting with our research concerns in the first place.

Sam: And here where the research is closely tied to practice. The researcher is required to 'get ethics' but without an obvious ethical event is forced to invent a sacrificial element (say a survey) so they have something to 'get ethics for.' But the main body of the research remains unexamined.

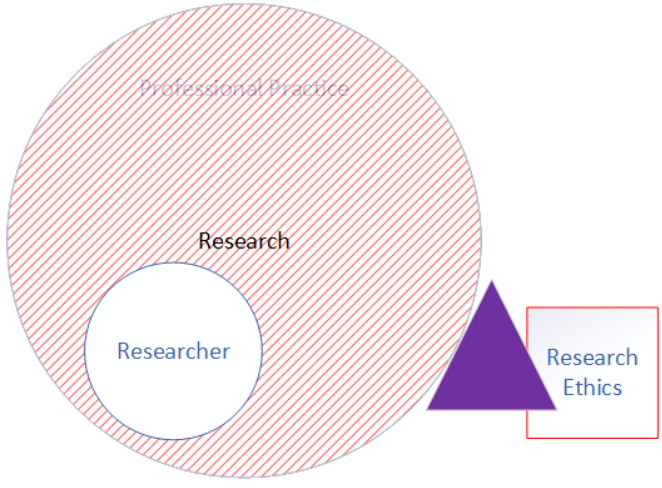

Figure 6. Obtaining ethics via a sacrificial exercise.

Glenys: Leaving our actual ethical demands—the ethics of becoming—completely unsupported.

Sam: And this next drawing sees this approach lead to an almost fictitious world set up, where we attempt to differentiate between the research environment and the research (and therefore research participants). But this can lead to perverse outcomes in practice and isn't amenable to more complex and fluid practice contexts.

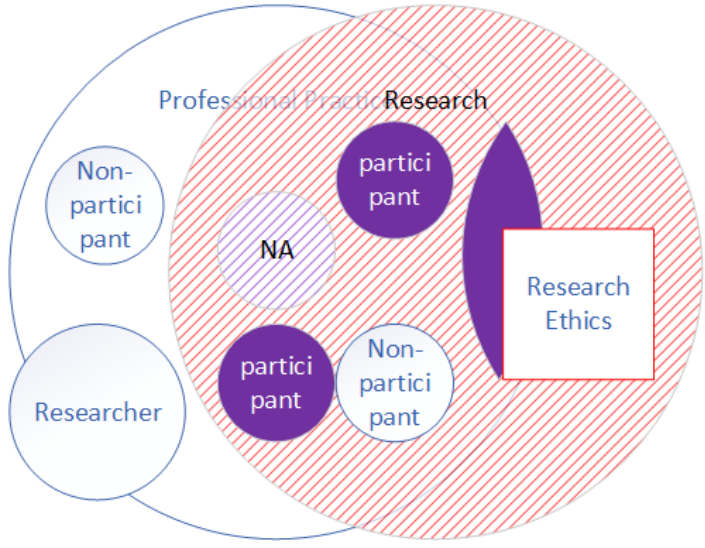

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Figure 7. Differentiating research environment and research.

Glenys: These drawings have helped us understand how ethical demands of Professional Practice research often get left out, unattended, or misplaced. Meanwhile our emergent ethical self, professional ethics, and research ethics as intertwined, are not developed, or only in a limited way, often leaving on-the-ground ethical dilemmas unsupported. No wonder our researchers can find the whole process frustrating. What thinking better supports our realities by taking an intertwined approach?

Sam: Cup of tea?

Ruth: Absolutely.

Glenys: Let's open these …

Glenys (dipping biscuit into tea): So, we've identified that Professional Practice research is about ethical becoming and living ethical practice. But current approaches to institutional ethics do little to support Professional Practice research and may even hinder this ethical becoming. Necessarily insider research means institutional ethics needs to come to meet Professional Practice research, not impose on or dislocate that research.

Ruth: We need an approach where we can embrace complex ethics (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). To encompass transgressiveness, for instance, and a situating of "ethics and politics" we find ourselves needing to think hard about emergent and urgent questions, as we ask ourselves, "what should I do?" (p. 454). This demands our becoming in practice. We are required to draw on our imagination and critical understanding to take up a position, to act. And, to foster this, we need an approach that nurtures and trusts us.

Glenys: To do this we can draw on transdisciplinary ethics (McGregor, 2015), encouraging dialogue across diverse

groups to address complex problems. And we can be guided by communitarian ethics (Christians, 2008), which encompasses social and feminist ethics to guide collaborative projects for civic good (Denzin, 2009).

All together: Ethical becoming is complex, transdisciplinary, communitarian.

Sam: Decolonising is important for Professional Practice. Tuck and Yang (2012) warn us to avoid the mistake of using decolonisation as a metaphor for human rights and social justice. Rather, decolonising demands an indigenous framework, land sovereignty, and indigenous ways of thinking. Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes what a decolonising response might be ... hold on a bit, here, she says: "Decolonisation, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognised as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power" (2012, p. 98)—a "constant struggle," as Sherwood and Anthony (2020, p. 20) put it. I remember in my work with Ron Bull, that Ron shared the importance of Indigeneity in all aspects of research. Institutions must be careful not to colonise through set processes.

Glenys: Sherwood and Anthony, is that in the Indigenous Research Ethics book?

Sam: Yes, I've got it here. Let me read a bit. Sherwood and Anthony (2020) describe a strengths-based approach to Indigenous ethics:

> We argue that Indigenous people should not be classified as a disempowered vulnerable people but as an empowered yet oppressed peoples through Western constructs situated within colonial structures. The shift in language respects and accepts that Indigenous people are experts in their lives and knowledge holders of their communities, cultures and countries, yet are in constant struggle with colonial relations, including research bodies that remain detached, aloof and considered by themselves as objective. (p. 20)

Glenys: Can I have a look? And in the introduction, "Indigenous communities to assert tino rangatiratanga, their right to sovereignty and self-determination in the research sphere by rejecting colonialist research practices and asserting their own, ethical protocols" (George et al., 2020, p. 3).

Ruth: Ethical becoming is te Tiriti responsive. As Holman Jones and Adams (2024) remind us, autoethnography contributes to our ethical "becoming-with." Rejecting an isolated 'I', we share situated emergent stories and contribute to new questions and insights into more ethical ways of being together. Decolonising is one such moving together.

Glenys: We are never alone in our stories. We need to be able to anticipate ethics as always emergent, in practice, and in the wider community (Tolich, 2010).

Ruth: Our colleague Martin Andrew (2015) points out that autoethnography can be a difficult fit for procedural ethics. For instance, the people in our stories, our memories, or who we might casually observe in amongst our days, are not 'participants' and nor is it a comfortable match describing or understanding 'data' in procedural terms.

Glenys: We can take a lot for autoethnography from Carolyn Ellis (2016). She shares how relational and care ethics can guide how we are with one another, and our responsibilities to ourselves and our communities. There isn't one exact rule, but we need to foreground relational concerns and make ethical decisions as we do in our own lives, but with even more care. We need trust—built through careful attention, self-reflexivity, compassion, and willingness to embrace new understanding, continually asking, "what should we do now?" She says we need to write ethically, questioning what we share and omit, use process consent, and embrace multiplicity in voice and interpretation. We might employ strategies such as fictionalising or composite characters.

Sam: Ethical becoming is relational.

Ruth: Our ethical responsibility is within our wider relationality of becoming. Karen Barad's "ethics of worlding" (2007, p. 89) reminds us that our practices make a difference in how the world is materialised. Thinking ethically is always thinking with a populated world. This is Donna Haraway's (2016) stance, in which de La Bellacasa (2017), drawing through a speculative care ethics lens, suggests we can help shape mutually flourishing worlds by asking, what is care here? I find this such hopeful questioning.

Sam: I hope there's more tea.

Ruth (gulping her tea): So, what is ethical for Professional Practice research is always a deeply relational questioning. You'll never walk alone.

Sam (clearing throat):

Ruth: Stop it. So, what is ethical for Professional Practice research is always a deeply relational questioning. Never alone. Our becoming requires modes of allyship and care to be continually reenvisioned. This is not some form of unobtainable puritanical selflessness (Shotwell, 2016), it is rather a deep and nourishing already-interconnectedness of worlds to come. Ethical becoming is worldly.

Glenys: We're going to want to come back to this thinking and propose an alternative ethics process to better support ethical becoming as living ethical practice. For the moment, let's write down where we are.

CONCLUSION

We have circled back to Denzin and Giardina's argument (2024) about our need to contribute to an ethically better world. To ask what is ethical is an ongoing and deeply relational concern for Professional Practice researchers.

Ethical becoming as living ethical practice is central to our inquiries. This is both an in-the-moment questioning and beyond the journey of our projects. Embedded in our Professional Practice frameworks of practice is an ongoing process of asking, what is ethical here?

Ethical becoming as living ethical practice is always in-relation-with, communitarian, and worldly. It is emergent and situated. It is constitutive, of selves and worlds. Our ethical becoming is complex, and potentially, most likely, transgressive. The process involves our emergent ethical self, our knowledge and integrity, diverse broad voices, and an ethics in practice drawn through professional, self, and research ethics. Returning to Denzin (2018), and research's 'call to arms,' we insist on this ethicality. Our very becoming is at stake.

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ETHICAL BECOMING: AN ALTERNATIVE ETHICS FRAMEWORK FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE RESEARCH

Sam Mann, Ruth Myers and Glenys Forsyth

INTRODUCTION

Garnett (2007) described how developing the work-based doctorate means institutions need new structural capital (such as policies and practices) to protect this doctorate from colonisation by inappropriate academic perspectives. In this article, we contribute to that structural capital by exploring the needs and drivers for a strengthened approach to the role of ethics in work-based doctorates. We see this article as a starting point for discussion.

This article draws on understandings outlined in "Ethical Becoming: Mapping the Demands of Professional Practice Research" (Mann et al., 2025), to frame and put forward a practical response. In that companion article, we position Professional Practice research ethics within interwoven domains of ethical self, research ethics, and professional ethics. We share several problematic implications of current procedural approaches to Professional Practice research ethics and draw together a conceptual framing to support an emergent and agential "ethical becoming."

This second article reflects on the challenges posed by Mann et al. (2025) and develops an alternative approach as a starting point for future discussion. In our conversations we alternated between contextual and more theoretical perspectives to arrive at a more refined position, and so we adopt this alternating approach here. We base this discussion around the context of the Otago Polytechnic Doctor of Professional Practice (DPP).

We introduce the concept of an Ethical Licence, drawing upon and extending *Research Ethics as Practice* (Forsyth, 2022). We propose an Ethical Licence will more fully support the emergent, on-the-ground, in situ ethical demands of Professional Practice research. The licence locates this ongoing learning within the interwoven domains of Professional Practice research ethics described above. We then return to the context of the DPP to test the applicability of the licence approach.

OTAGO POLYTECHNIC DOCTOR OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The Doctor of Professional Practice (DPP) is a third-generation professional doctorate (Costley & Lester, 2012; Stephenson et al., 2004; Wildy et al., 2015). The first-generation professional doctorates were developed by specialising within a PhD structure, and the second generation, by taking this specialisation to the work-place. The third-generation professional doctorates were developed from the ground up, focusing first on practice-led, self-determined development and then ensuring that the level of qualification was sufficiently doctoral. Karetai et al. (2023) argue that the decolonising fabric of the DPP—in privileging self-determination, identity, and multiple ways of knowing—takes DPP research beyond work-based practice to much wider identity-practice as the site for inquiry. This effectively makes the DPP a fourth-generation professional doctorate.

There are several principles underpinning the fourth-generation doctorate. The learner is the expert in their own field (hence we have "mentors" rather than "supervisors"), the research is practice-led and, crucially for this discussion, the doctorate is explicitly designed to be self-determined: the candidate manages their own journey (Wildy et al., 2015).

The Otago Polytechnic DPP Programme Document describes this journey:

> The programme outcomes to be produced by these candidates are real time projects with tangible results that have a *useful purpose within a responsible set of values and ethical considerations* [emphasis added]. It is a work-based doctorate which is a trans-disciplinary, learner-centred research and development programme, offering benefit for both the individual professional development of the practitioner, and their area of practice. Motivationally this group is much less likely to be interested in pursuing research as an end in itself, or contributing to the stock of academic knowledge, than in using an inquiring and innovative approach to practice and producing knowledge that has direct application to their professional endeavours. (Otago Polytechnic, 2017, p. 19)

The goals of practice-led research are to "transform the world from 'what is' to something better ... concerned with intervention, innovation, and change—rather than designing research according to what is measurable, publishable" (Scrivener, 2000, p. 1). Combined with the control resting with the practitioner (Wildy et al., 2015), and the ethos of practice as research (Costley & Lester, 2012), the fourth-generation doctorate is geared to addressing complex organisational and social issues. It is developed specifically for the "swampy lowland" (Schön, 1983, p. 42), "mess" (Ackoff, 1997), and "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973) of real practice situations. All this results in a situation that does not allow "intellectual imperialism based on pre-defined contexts or methodologies" (Stephenson et al., 2004, p. 2)—and this includes the approach to ethics. The "useful purpose within a responsible set of values and ethical considerations" (Otago Polytechnic, 2017, p. 19) of the programme's outcome brings ethics to the fore of DPP learning, lifting it beyond what is seen by many learners as a compliance hurdle.

Like most institutions, Otago Polytechnic operates three levels of approval for institutional research ethics: Category A is for high risk (vulnerable people, stress, deception, sensitive subjects, conflict); Category B is for low/moderate risk (personal data, minor stress, external partners, surveys), and Category C is for minimal risk research (public data, prior approvals).

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ETHICAL LICENCE TO OPERATE

"Category A" describes a level of scrutiny not, as is commonly assumed, the specific instrument used to manage this level of rigour. We propose an alternative high-scrutiny process for Professional Practice. This might be codified as a form which we refer to as "Category A2" (to distinguish it from existing instruments, which we refer to as "A1"). We propose an approach whereby Professional Practice Learners apply for a Category A2 Ethical Licence to Operate ("Licence") (see Figure 1). This would act like a driver's license, giving permission to operate within a set of protocols and endorsed for different contexts. We do not argue for the replacement of the current process or forms (A1 or B) as most research in the institution will continue to use them.

This licensing process is in alignment with Forsyth's (2022) model of developing a "professional self" (p. 40) in which candidates must consider the moral imperatives underpinning the changes that their project may be aiming for as well as the ethical implications of the impact that their research may have on their organisation or professional practice. Whereas Forsyth saw this process as formative, and to be followed by formal research ethics (A or B), we see the License itself being at the level of Category A, with agreed processes and protocols for Professional Practice autoethnographic research and endorsed for different contexts. Only when there is a specific ethically significant event (we refer to these as "ethicable"), such as a survey or interview, would B or A1 approval

be required. If the research was to cross other boundaries such as the unexpected involvement of vulnerable participants, then the process of updating the context endorsement of A2 might require B or A1 approval.

Figure 1. Category A Ethical Licence to Operate ("Licence").

Such a structure was originally proposed in the original Doctor of Professional Practice Programme Document (Otago Polytechnic, 2017) (though the Licence was then seen at the level of Category B):

> A significant learning from the MPP [Master of Professional Practice] is of the challenges of applying ethics processes to work-based professional practice research. The issue with standard approaches is twofold: timing, and the nature of work-based professional practice research not really aligning with existing ethics processes. The ethics process for the DPP (and the MPP) has a separation of ethical understanding from process of ethics. Both of these are managed by a two stage Category B Ethics Delegation (which may result in a requirement for a Category A). When required for the project ethics approval must be obtained from the Otago Polytechnic Ethics committee (Category A). (p. 41)

The process in the Doctor of Professional Practice Programme Document describes a process of "B1 Ethical Awareness":

> As part of the learning agreement, learners will be required to complete a series of tasks (i.e., a workbook) that is aimed to help them demonstrate an understanding of ethics of practitioner research. This will also form part of the Learning Agreement professional presentation/discussion. Through a series of exercises, thoughtful responses are prompted on:

- General ethical understanding.
- Ethics of profession.
- Codes of Ethics for their profession/s.
- Research ethics (understanding of premise and mechanics of research ethics).
- Professional change ethics.
- Practitioner Research Ethics.
- Research project, a discussion of specific challenges raised by the current research. (Otago Polytechnic, 2017, p. 41)

The programme document then goes on to describe a B2 process by which conventional research ethics are used to approve of research instruments. "Depending on the research design," it continues, "this may need to be done more than once, and may result in a requirement that Category A is completed" (Otago Polytechnic, 2017, p. 42).

While this process is still described in the approved Doctor of Professional Practice Programme Document, the letter of approval from New Zealand Qualifications Authority recommended to Otago Polytechnic that it should send DPP ethics applications to the Otago Polytechnic Ethics Committee. It is worth noting that this recommendation does not preclude a Licence process, just that it be overseen by the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee (OPREC). Although the usual pattern is that category B applications are delegated to academic departments while category A is considered by OPREC, the NZQA approval letter does not actually specify A nor the A1 form.

While the intention of the DPP programme document was for a high level of scrutiny via a B1/B2 process, and the B was intended to show an alternative, we can appreciate that it might look like we were trying to avoid a higher level of scrutiny (A1). For this reason, the current proposal makes it clear that the A2 is at an equal if not higher level of scrutiny to category A1.

We propose an Ethical Licence (A2), applied for as part of the preparation of the Learning Agreement, on the basis of an evaluated "ethical awareness" and articulation of the parameters within which the research can proceed—the agreed path, deviation from which would require conventional ethics consideration. So, what might such an Ethical Licence A2 process look like? First, how might ethical awareness be evaluated?

TOWARDS A SELF-EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL AWARENESS

We cannot expect learners to miraculously be able to articulate their ethical awareness. We suggest using critical evaluative questions to frame and support ongoing and emergent responses throughout Professional Practice Research.

Previously, we have developed the Necessarily-Insider Research Framework (NIRF) (Mann et al., 2024). This framework is informed by Carol Costley's (2018) approach to Professional Practice, Tracy's Big Tent criteria (López & Tracy, 2020; Tracy, 2010) and Patton's Developmental Evaluation (2015). It sets up 12 Principles of Professional Practice and 16 Quality Criteria, posing 192 evaluative questions from which to select from to guide research journeys. By adopting this evaluative question approach, NIRF acknowledges the complexity and messiness of practice in an authentic, emergent, and responsive manner and adapts to different situations without enforcing a rigid, one-size-fits-all method.

Foregrounding the significance of ethical questioning throughout Professional Practice research journeys, NIRF arranges ethical evaluative questions under a Quality Criteria column and Professional Practice Principle row. Examples of Ethical Quality Criteria include:

- Worthy Topic – Does the approach address ethical dilemmas in practice research?
- Developmental Purpose – How does the approach evolve in response to emergent ethical challenges?
- Credibility – How do you know your ethical reasoning is sound?

Examples of Ethical Professional Practice Principles include:

- Transdisciplinary – Are ethical practice standards from multiple fields considered and respected?
- Reflexivity – What protocols ensure safety of reflections?
- Transgressive – Whose transgressive agenda does the research contribute to?

Ethics can also be seen across various other aspects of the NIRF – a row on "collective" and a column on "Co-creation," for example. Similarly, Te Tiriti is purposefully integrated into all aspects in terms of partnerships and collective ways of being, knowing, and doing. NIRF evaluative questioning contributes to learning informing the Ethical License.

ETHICAL BECOMING, ETHICAL MATURITY

We draw on maturity models (Mann & Bates, 2017; Willard, 2005) to structure a self-assessment of ethical practice not as a checklist of compliance, but as a journey of ethical becoming (Table 1). These models describe development as a continuum from avoidance and compliance to fully integrated, values-driven transformation.

While Willard's (2005) model for sustainability maturity was written for business sustainable maturity, the descriptors are adapted here as the basis for the maturity of individuals in terms of their adoption of ethical principles. Practice evolves from regulatory avoidance through compliance and efficiency, into transformative integration and ultimately purpose-driven impact. Crucially, progression beyond Stage 3 is not incremental but transformational—requiring deep personal and professional internalisation. As Willard (2005, p. 29) writes, "Stage 5 companies are successful businesses so that they can continue to do the right things." This shift in motivation and identity is at the heart of ethical becoming as living ethical practice.

We propose that ethical maturity be developed and demonstrated through reflective self-assessment across eight key ethical themes (listed below, derived from the NIRF evaluative questions). For each theme, reflective questions support the learner to locate themselves within a maturity rubric—such as Theme 1: Relational Ethics and Ethics of Care (see Table 2)—in order to guide their ethical development over time.

To qualify for an Ethical Research Licence, learners should:

- Achieve at least Level 3 (Instrumental – moving toward integration) in all eight themes, and
- Hold an average rating of at least 3.5, indicating movement toward ethical integration and becoming.

By adapting this maturity model to ethical professional practice, we aim to support learners in locating themselves within a relational, developmental, and reflective ethical space—where ethics is not about compliance or form-filling, but about maturing their stance as researchers, collaborators, and members of a wider professional and cultural ecosystem.

Stage	Description
1. Avoidance	Ethics is unconsidered or resisted; minimal engagement with ethical ideas.
2. Compliance	Ethics is procedural and institutional—focused on forms and approval.
3. Instrumental	Ethics is used to protect reputation or enable research; it is applied when required.
4. Integrated	Ethics is embedded across the project; relational and contextual concerns guide action.
5. Becoming	Ethics shapes identity and leadership; practice is motivated by care, justice, and transformation.

Table 1. Ethical Becoming Maturity Model.

Maturity Stage	Descriptor	Reflective Indicators
1. Avoidance	Relational ethics is unconsidered or dismissed. Ethics is viewed as abstract, external, or irrelevant. Relationships are instrumental, extractive, or assumed.	Participants treated as data sources. No attention to care, dignity, or connectedness. No awareness of ethical responsibilities beyond institutional compliance.
2. Compliance	Ethics is addressed procedurally (for instance through consent forms or institutional review) but without deep engagement. Respect and care are present but passive or generic.	Informed consent is obtained as a box-ticking exercise. Relationships are courteous but formal. No ongoing ethical engagement beyond start of project.
3. Instrumental	Relational ethics is seen as useful for project success (for example, recruitment, access). Care is conditional and context-specific. Place and positionality are acknowledged, but not integrated.	Ethics of care invoked to build trust or manage risk. Cultural or place-based considerations are addressed when needed. Ethical relationality is project-serving rather than practice-defining.
4. Integrated	Relational ethics is embedded throughout the project. Care and connection are sustained across roles and time. Ethics of place is respected and relational dynamics are consciously navigated.	Relationships are reciprocal, context-sensitive, and valued. Ethical care is maintained across project phases and roles. Place, power, and connectedness are actively considered and discussed.
5. Becoming	Ethics of care and relationality form part of practitioner identity. Research is an enactment of ethical responsibility to people, communities, and place. Ethical reflexivity is ongoing and shapes leadership.	Care and dignity are enacted as foundational, not additional. Practice sustains long-term relationships, not just project tasks. The practitioner sees themselves as part of an ethical ecosystem, not apart from it.

Table 2. Ethical Maturity for Theme 1: Relational Ethics and Ethics of Care.

KEY ETHICAL THEMES

Relational ethics and ethics of care

- How are relational ethics and ethics of care seen in respect, dignity, and connectedness?
- How do I promote an ethics of care and relational ethics, including ethics of place?
- How does my ongoing approach to relational ethics improve research and practice?

These questions emphasise compassionate, relationally grounded, and ongoing ethical engagement across all research stages and stakeholders.

Critical ethical self-awareness

- How do I know my ethical reasoning is sound?
- Is my deep reflexive scrutiny evident?
- How transparent and self-reflexive am I about my positionality, and identities across contexts?
- What is the role of ethics in research and practice?

This theme calls for integrity in practice through self-awareness, positionality, and visible ethical alignment, with an ongoing attention to learning.

Complex contexts

- How does my research deal with the notion that it cannot offer true anonymity nor informed consent? (Ellis, 2007; van den Hoonaard, 2003)
- How are my ethical considerations nuanced in the face of complexity?
- How are practice and research ethics extended in time and space, and to others more broadly?
- Does the approach challenge conventional boundaries and norms?
- How does the approach to innovation recognise complex change and uncertainty?

These questions reveal a situated and nuanced approach to ethics where standard protocols may not suffice and ongoing ethical discernment is paramount.

Moral courage and unintended consequences

- How can I be sure I am not making something else worse?
- Especially if stepping outside the norm, how do I know the research is the right thing to do (and continues to be)?
- How have I considered whether I should make a difference? And, if I should, what are the appropriate leverage points?
- Is the ethical stance of my research transparently communicated?
- In what ways is the ethical questioning ongoing and unwavering?
- Does the approach address ethical dilemmas in practice research?

This theme introduces deliberative ethics: not only acting ethically but questioning whether intervention is warranted at all.

Trust, authenticity, transparency, and sovereignty

- How are multiple voices heard throughout the work?
- Are my immersion and vulnerability transparently shared?
- Is there a transparent exploration of practice's multifaceted, multi-reality nature?
- Does the research deal with the messy real world that defies simple solutions?
- Are practices and findings explored, stretched, and tested by multiple dimensions (including new)?

These questions point to the importance of transparency, co-presence, and building trust through authentic voice and representation.

Collective and communitarian ethics

- How does the research contribute to collective and communitarian ethics? Who are the participants?
- How are all participants and stakeholders valued and respected (and how do they know that)?
- Is the commitment to collective ethics and collaboration transparent?
- How does an ongoing approach to relational ethics improve research and practice? (rather than now-distributed barrier)

Ethics is not an individual virtue but a collective endeavour, particularly in participatory, situated, and post-disciplinary research.

Te Tiriti-based ethical practice

- How does this research enact the spirit of and responsibilities set out by Te Tiriti?
- In what ways are Māori participants, perspectives, and knowledge initiating, leading, co-designing, or shaping the research?
- How does the research demonstrate partnership, protection, and participation in form and substance?
- What specific benefits and outcomes for Māori communities are being pursued—and who defines them?
- How is mātauraka Māori being treated—as data, as inspiration, or as co-intelligence? Is its authority upheld?
- How are relationships with iwi, hapū, or whānau being built, sustained, and reciprocated?
- How does the research consider the flourishing of te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and Māori futures?
- How are non-Māori researchers critically reflecting on their power, position, and responsibilities under Te Tiriti?
- What does a Te Tiriti responsive practitioner in my field look like?

Practitioners' research in Aotearoa must honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a living, relational, and constitutional foundation. This requires more than cultural competence or consultation; it calls for an active commitment to relational partnership, sovereignty of mātauraka Māori, and co-determination of research purpose, process, and benefit (Sherwood & Anthony, 2020). Ethical Tiriti practice involves not only identifying the relevance of the research to Māori but enacting this research as a Tiriti relationship—one that reflects mana-enhancing engagement, shared authority, reciprocal contribution, and critical reflexivity about positionality and power.

This approach is intended as a starting point for discussion and treats Te Tiriti not as a procedural checkbox, but as an ongoing ethical stance, requiring continuous reflection, responsiveness, and accountability to Māori partners, knowledge systems, and aspirations.

Ethics beyond procedure

- How does the research evolve to enhance its transformative potential?
- Are ethical practice standards from multiple fields considered and respected?
- Are ethical considerations coherently integrated throughout the research?
- How does a critical ethical stance inform practice?
- Does the approach address ethical dilemmas in practice research?
- How are situational and relational ethics consistently used to question, reflect upon, and critique decisions?
- How does the approach evolve in response to emergent ethical challenges?

The ethical description in NIRF (Mann et al., 2024) reads, "nuanced, ongoing ethical attention, encompassing communitarian, place, space and time ... [means] ethical research [that] transcends procedural requirements, embedding moral considerations in every decision and interaction." Ethics shifts from rule-following to ethos—a deeply embedded, continuously reflected way of being in research.

PROTOCOLS FOR PRACTICE

The Ethical Research Licence is not a rigid protocol, but a defined ethical space—a broad, values-based track within which the professional practice researcher operates. It offers autonomy within accountability, encouraging practitioner-researchers to engage ethically in complex, emergent, and relational contexts.

The Licence as a defined ethical track

The Licence defines a zone of endorsed practice based on ethical maturity across eight themes. Within this track, researchers may use flexible, creative, and emergent methods (for example, professional practice autoethnography, participatory inquiry, and reflexive design). The track is not unlimited: it is defined by the maturity model, reflective protocols, and an endorsed context of practice.

Context-specific endorsement

Each Licence is issued for a specific context, based on the practitioner's declared scope, roles, relationships, and likely methods. The Licence does not automatically extend to all contexts. For example:

- A Licence for a reflective design project in education does not cover a public-facing health campaign involving minors.
- A Licence may be issued to enable emergent inquiry within workplace roles but would not cover formal interviews with vulnerable clients unless explicitly added.

When standard ethics approval is required

The Ethical Licence does not replace formal OPREC Category A1 or B approval when:

- A defined ethically significant event occurs, such as: Surveys or structured interviews beyond the researcher's organisational role; collection of identifiable personal or health data, or work with vulnerable populations (for example, minors, prisoners, or persons under care).
- The research shifts into a new context not covered by the original licence.
- The risk profile escalates (for example, media exposure, conflict of interest, or reputational impact).

In such cases, researchers must:

- Pause and update their licence.
- Seek additional guidance or standard ethics review (category A1 or B) as needed.
- Document the shift through a Licence Variation Form or similar protocol.

Breach and revocation

If a researcher operates outside the defined ethical track without review or adaptation, their licence may be:

- paused for review,
- revoked, requiring resubmission, or
- referred to standard OPREC processes.

Breaches may include acting in ethically unsafe ways, failing to respond to new risks, or disregarding collective obligations to communities or collaborators.

Living protocols and shared responsibility

The Licence is guided by maturity, not micromanagement. Ethical judgement is expected to be relational, reflexive, and ongoing. Practitioners are encouraged to regularly revisit:

- Their ethical maturity self-assessment,
- Reflections from supervision or peer review,
- Shifts in context, relationships, or power dynamics.

OTAGO POLYTECHNIC CATEGORY A1 AND LICENCE A2 COMPARED

In Table 3, we use these themes to consider how well the Licence approach maps to the existing Category A1 questions. Our aim here is an enhanced level of scrutiny on the areas covered by the current Category A1 process, but through asking different questions.

Otago Polytechnic Category A1 Section (2025)	Relevant Ethical Licence A2 Commitments (as themes) and Endorsement Conditions	Notes on Licence Extension or Enrichment
Lay Summary of Project	Trust, Authenticity, Transparency, and Sovereignty	A place to begin showing researcher presence, clarity of voice, and the relational commitment to transparency.
Research Aim and Question(s)	Moral Courage and Unintended Consequences	Ethical Licence encourages asking: Should this research be done? and What are its ripple effects?—not just stating the academic rationale.
Research Design	Critical Ethical Self-Awareness Moral Courage and Unintended Consequences Ethics Beyond Procedure Te Tiriti-based Ethical Practice	Licence requires not just methodological description, but reflexivity, ethical positioning, and evolving values embedded in research choices. Requires Kaupapa Māori or Tiriti Responsive-aligned methods.
Participants and Recruitment	Relational Ethics and Ethics of Care Collective and Communitarian Ethics Te Tiriti-based Ethical Practice	Ethical Licence expands participant engagement into mana enhancing, mutual care, shared ownership, and collective benefit, not just recruitment.
Vulnerability	Relational Ethics and Ethics of Care Critical Ethical Self-Awareness Complex contexts	Ethical Licence sees both participants and researchers as vulnerable. Power, identity, and risk are fluid and must be managed relationally.
Socio-cultural Considerations	Relational Ethics Trust, Authenticity, Transparency, and Sovereignty Collective and Communitarian Ethics Te Tiriti-based Ethical Practice	OP focuses on cultural safety; Ethical Licence adds co-authorship, authentic presence, community-defined relevance, and adds sovereignty of knowledge systems, not just cultural sensitivity.
Use of Personal Information	Complex Contexts	The Ethical Licence questions assumptions about anonymity, representation, and participant visibility, especially in insider or participatory work.

Data Storage	Trust, Authenticity, Transparency, and Sovereignty	The Ethical Licence encourages researchers to reflect ethical intent in access control, co-ownership, or return of data to communities.
Participant Incentives / Remuneration / Koha	Collective and Communitarian Ethics	Ethical Licence helps researchers to consider koha as cultural obligation.
Potential Harm	Moral Courage and Unintended Consequences Ethics Beyond Procedure	Ethical Licence expands "harm" to include epistemic violence, representational harm, or silencing of others through unintended consequences.
Treaty Considerations	Critical Ethical Self-Awareness Trust, Authenticity, Transparency, and Sovereignty Collective Ethics Te Tiriti-based Ethical Practice	Reframes awareness of Te Tiriti to an embedded ethical stance and relational commitment, guiding the whole research process. The Ethical Licence strengthens attention to reflexivity, relationality, and Te Tiriti responsive practices.
Relations with Other Ethics Committees or Institutions	Moral Courage and Unintended Consequences	Relevant when ethical standards or power dynamics differ across institutions; approach invites deliberation and sovereignty.
Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools	Critical Ethical Self-Awareness Ethics Beyond Procedure	Ethical Licence prompts deeper reflection on algorithmic bias, data ethics, and the limits of AI epistemologies.
(Not on current Category A1) How are ethics continuously negotiated during the project?	Ethics Beyond Procedure	OP form assumes ethics is set at the beginning and deviation requires re-approval. Ethical Licence views ethics as relational and evolving, especially in emergent or participatory research.
(Not on current Category A1)	Critical Ethical Self-Awareness	Reflexivity is implied but not required. The Licence makes researcher identity, bias, and positional influence explicit, which is particularly important in insider research.

Table 3. Existing Category A1 and Ethical Licence A2 compared.

CONCLUSION

Ethical becoming is vital for Professional Practice research. This is emergent, relational, and entwined with practice itself, rather than separate from it. As a contribution for discussion, we have proposed an alternative ethical process, tailored to Professional Practice Research.

In the context of a research practice where current ethics protocols do not serve the needs of Professional Practice researchers (Mann et al., 2025) it is easy to see how the current A1 process gives rise to a perception of a one-off gatekeeping hurdle, despite the best intentions of those individuals genuinely committed to risk management and harm prevention. We reframe the conversation and raise the possibility of an ongoing, situated, and relational practice. This extends Forsyth's (2022) ethical self and researcher consideration into the formal process rather than as a precursor to institutional ethics.

This ethics approach recognises that Professional Practice research is often messy, relational, and emergent, with blurry boundaries between researcher and participant, context and intervention. As such, transactional models (based on fixed protocols and pre-defined risks) are often inadequate or inappropriate. Instead, we follow a developmental, reflective, and principled framework rooted in ethics of care, relational accountability, and co-evolution with context.

We look forward to the ongoing discussion.

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ADVENTURING IN DOCTORATE LAND: CHANGES WITHIN ME FROM A YEAR OF EXPLORING

Leigh Quadling-Miernik

In the article "Packed and Ready to Venture Forth" (Quadling-Miernik, 2024), I left the reader with the image of me heading off on an adventure, packed with all the resources, equipment, and probably extraneous stuff that I thought I needed to survive my adventure in data analysis. Knowles (2016, p. 99) says, "Professional doctorate researching is a transformative practice in and of itself." Therefore, in this article, I would like to answer the question: what has the one year of exploring taught me about myself?

As background, I have travelled to over 30 different countries in this wide world, and I have lived and worked in six of them including Aotearoa New Zealand. In each country I have added to my knowledge about myself as a person and as a professional as I have navigated around the complex environment of a foreign land. Some of those countries were less foreign than others, but arrival still meant locating myself and learning to operate. These experiences have developed and changed me, which illustrates Knowles' statement above that we change as people through the learning we have.

Google Gemini (Open AI, 2025), in response to the statement "process of adjusting to living in a new country," suggests the following:

The four important factors for a smooth transition:

- Positive Attitude—embrace the new experiences and be open to learning new things.
- Flexibility—be adaptable and willing to adjust to different situations and customs.
- Self-Awareness—recognise own cultural biases and actively work to overcome them.
- Respect for local customs —learn about and follow local etiquette and social norms.

Already you can see how these four factors might support the transition of an educational practitioner to a doctoral student.

In this article I review:

- The land I come from: TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Land;
- The land I live in now: Practitioner Land, and
- The land I visit: Doctorate Land.

I will explore the identity of Leigh through four lenses looking across each of those lands: experience, emotions, adjusting/adopting/adapting, and questioning and reflecting.

Whalley (2016) explored her change from practitioner to early-stage researcher by mapping incidents through the transition. By looking at the lands I inhabit and their differences I can see the changes and development within me as a result of living in these different locations. Labaree (2003) supports us to overcome the perceived "cultural divide" (p. 21) between educators and education doctoral researchers through explicitly focusing on this divide and demonstrating that it may not be as wide as it seems. Through writing this article, I hope to map the border between Practitioner Land and Doctorate Land.

EXPERIENCE

TESOL Land: the land I originally come from	I taught children, teenagers and adults from different countries and cultures with the express purpose of improving their English. I also taught teachers with the purpose of developing and building their pedagogy and skillset. I know this world like the back of my hand. I understand all the nuances. I hold all the qualifications to be able to live in this world. My community was my 'family.' Our discussions were familiar as our language was the same. My actions were similar to my colleagues' actions and, where they differed, we helped each other develop. I was never alone and actively had to escape for a private life.
Practitioner Land: the land I inhabit now	I live in the tertiary world now. I have been here five years. This is my practitioner world. I am involved in education of adult students through working with their tutors and the students themselves to develop better teaching and learning. Education and teaching adults are familiar. I know teaching and I know learning so, when things are strange, I fall back on my experience to overcome the obstacles and even push aside the challenges I encounter. The language is almost the same. Communication is smooth, as if we have different accents in the same language. So, when I don't understand, I ask and the answers are understood. This lexis becomes part of my vocabulary.
Doctorate Land: the land I visit on study days	I am a doctoral student visiting the Otago Polytechnic/Capable NZ Doctor of Professional Practice land. Here, I am researching teacher education so that I can understand my practitioner world better. I am alone but I have two friends, and I know a community I can reach out to if I want to. The language is strange and, in the beginning, I struggled to understand, often resorting to a dictionary to follow readings or conversations. More recently, I can read without worry or struggle as I know the lexis within the text. My academic literacy has changed. My actions are planned, thought about, and discussed beforehand, researched to understand which actions to take and why. My actions I feel are not similar to anyone's, because I don't discuss them with anyone but my mentors. My mentors at the start told me what to do, but yet also expect justification from me of my decisions on my actions.

Buss et al. (2014) say that education doctorate students "do not hold prominent perceptions of themselves as researchers" (p. 137), while Labaree (2003) acknowledges that "doctoral students in education have already lived a life" (p. 16). Here I can relate. I lived in TESOL Land for over 25 years, with thousands of students, colleagues, bosses, and others sharing this time. Yet none were researchers for me to observe nor could they mentor me. In Practitioner Land and Doctorate Land I utilise my previous life to develop and adapt but I do not feel at ease within myself here.

Returning to the important factors for a smooth transition, what has aided this change? A positive attitude has helped here. I have been alone but been comfortable with this as I knew it would be a solo journey. Flexibility has supported the change. Different environments do not scare me; usually they excite me. Just being on the doctorate journey is changing me, from someone reluctant to disclose my study and hesitant to explore to now being open and up front in stating that I am an emerging researcher in the area of tertiary teacher education.

EMOTIONS

TESOL Land	In my TESOL world I was bored. Excitement came occasionally due to students presenting situations never experienced before. I could predict responses to my questions before students or staff uttered them. Life was routine and the emotions were stable. Anger very rarely occurred and any frustration was only due to lack of resources, money, or time.
Practitioner Land	Emotions are settling because I have been here over five years. I am not as naïve as I was. Boredom is starting to creep in, yet each intake of students brings excitement as there will be more opportunities to support them to achieve their goals. I have slowly built relationships with the tutors whom I support. They didn't trust me at first, because I was not from their land. I was an outsider. Who was I to offer suggestions and advice on teaching in the tertiary world? The occasional distrust happened because of my authority that came with my position or my knowledge. Justification became my new response to questions asked of me.
Doctorate Land	I visit the doctoral student land during my study periods: Wednesday and Friday afternoons and either one or both days during the weekend. The time is precious, and I get annoyed if for any reason I can't visit. At first, I was naïve and innocent, aimlessly blundering about, not knowing if I was causing offence or amusement. My mentors, I assume, knowingly smiled at my actions and statements like parents watching a child's first interactions with a pet, new food, or toy. I am frustrated because I know I can do better; I know I have the skills and intelligence. I just seem to stumble, get lost, and am confused. I am excited and in disbelief. Finally, the journey towards my goal has started and is progressing. How have I got here and why do people think I can do it? I pass each milestone with disbelief that I have completed the slog and achieved that step. I am determined. The challenge to understand, to develop and prove myself to myself and others pushes me forward and drags me into my study block.

Labaree (2003) speaks about how education doctorate students are released from responsibility, allowing their focus to change from teaching and learning events and classroom processes to understanding these events and processes. By looking at my time in Doctorate Land, I can see that I too am changing from the doing to the understanding; in other words, from the practical to the theoretical. I step away from doing into examining my experiences and research in relation to what other researchers have said. It has been difficult to switch into the identity of a researcher.

What has helped this change? Recognising that I am resilient during this difficult transition, I can overcome hurdles and get through the struggles. Cook (2020) says "not everyone has the fortitude, persistence or resilience" (p. 47) to complete a PhD, something that resonates with my journey. I have shifted from feeling like I am one of Cook's "not everyone," unable, wavering and fragile, to feeling I am someone who can complete. Being self-aware is another factor that has allowed me to grow in my sense of belonging to the community of researchers. I can see the differences between the TESOL and the tertiary worlds and have explored what these differences mean and how to adapt myself.

ADJUSTING/ADOPTING/ADAPTING

TESOL Land	In my TESOL Land I rarely adjusted or adapted myself. I hardly ever adopted a new position, a new action, or a new skill. With over 25 years' experience it was me supporting others to change and develop. There were few moments of reflective practice, more within my teaching than anything else: what could I have changed in the delivery to support students better? I never reflected on what I could change within myself to improve myself. In TESOL Land I learnt my students' cultural background and how they influenced their learning. I never needed to examine my own culture; the Pākehā that I am nor the Māori influences on my culture.
Practitioner Land	Here, I know I have adapted my behaviours, my actions, and my language. I incorporate tikanga Māori and te reo Māori into my daily actions due to the need to be inclusive of the environment I am in and the students I face. I felt so uncomfortable standing where I stood that I started my te reo and mātauranga journey. This knowledge brought a deeper understanding of not only the effects of colonialism and my determination to improve the current situation but also of where my Māori students live and often breathe. My learning aligns with my beliefs about education and the Māori tikanga principles of kaitiakitanga, whanaungatanga, and manaakitanga.
Doctorate Land	Here I am reaching for security and stability in where I stand. I know if I copy what others say and do then I am not going to fall or be judged as an outsider. I follow others without knowledge. I listen and belief in my mentors without understanding and hardly ask questions. I am afraid to show I don't understand so I nod and say I do. Over time I stop crawling and can stand, wobbling in my own knowledge. I understand the bubble around me and, more importantly, I decide on and believe in my actions. I am adopted into a community and find myself adjusting to their culture.

The culture gap is emphasised when practitioners are asked to abandon the teaching culture to take up the academic culture (Labaree, 2003). Cook (2020) tells supervisors to respect and foster the growth in doctorate students as they develop and become confident to "stand their ground" (p. 46). In Doctorate Land I have gained confidence in who I am within my identity as a researcher. I now no longer fear questions from my mentors. In Practitioner Land I am confident in knowing that my experience carries through, and I can stand proud with my skillset, bridging the gap. Cook (2020) also says that the first rule of a PhD is to "accept the role of a neophyte or beginner, albeit a talented, educated one" (p. 44).

What factors have supported me transition? Ultimately, the key factor is developing a high level of respect. Respect for the theorists who lay the foundations for my understanding. Respect for my mentors who guide and support my wobbly steps towards vaguely running. Respect towards myself that, though I have limited knowledge in Doctorate Land, I am willing to grow and open to that growth through using my skills from TESOL Land and Practitioner Land.

QUESTIONING AND REFLECTING

TESOL Land	In my TESOL Land, questions were more than likely to be directed to me than to come from me. I was the wise one people turned to for answers. If I did question, it was to understand the thinking behind the questions asked to me. It is easier to disseminate answers when you understand the reason behind the questions. My other questions were in order to understand the reasons for actions taken by people so I could decide upon my approach—would it be to support and develop the person, or would it be to discipline the person? Very rarely did I reflect on my actions, my questioning, or my behaviour beyond the teaching.
Practitioner Land	In my Practitioner Land, I question, and I reflect often. I question to understand the nuance of the situation that is familiar but yet not. I reflect to see if I can draw upon past experiences to support new experiences. I reflect often on my time in Doctorate Land as a student, to show up for and support the tertiary students who come to me overwhelmed with returning to study after years in their respective careers. I can relate to their emotions, their questions, and their struggles.
Doctorate Land	I feel that my time in Doctorate Land consists of nothing but questions. First, it started with the question of what I wanted to know that led to researching the answer. Then it went to questioning every item of vocabulary, each article I read, every action I make, and every word I write. This is interspersed with questions to myself about why, when, how, who, and what, and around the topics of methodology, methods, epistemology, research design, the implementation of research, analysis, timeframe, progress, and probably much more. Finally, the big question asked by everyone who doesn't visit doctorate land is *Why are you doing a doctorate?* With the sub-questions: *When will you finish? What's it about?* quickly followed by *Huh*, *what does that mean?* In Doctorate Land the word reflection is overtaken by a new vocabulary item: reflexivity. Here I have to learn the vocabulary item's meaning before I can enact it. I struggle to be reflexive, automatically slipping into reflection. I have taken over two years to cement actions to the meaning of this term. And I still question myself: Have I truly got it? Am I being reflexive enough?

Dall'Alba (2009) outlines that through questioning and reflecting on ourselves and the world around us, we can transform. In becoming an academic, and belonging to the world of academics, part of the process is questioning myself in the non-academic world. Labaree states that "if teaching is a normative practice … then educational research is a distinctly more analytical practice" (2003, p. 17), where the former focuses on producing outcomes and the latter on producing explanations. Acknowledging there is a difference between Practitioner Land and Doctorate Land, I am adjusting to the requirements from me in both. Labaree (2003) further outlines how theoretical discussions can be eclipsed by a practitioner's experience, which brings me solace because it suggests that the division between the two lands is not wide and extreme but that they are interlaced and strengthened by each other.

Of the factors that support this transition, it is my reflection and focus on reflexivity that are most important. Helping me adjust is my own self-awareness of how I analyse my data, not with the question *What happened in the story?* but *What is the story telling me and how do I know this?* I am aware that I can see myself in participants' narratives but that I also need to see beyond myself.

The year of exploring has brought about a feeling of belonging and becoming a native in the world of academia. As I will hopefully end my doctorate within a year, perhaps my transition will now be one of a successful doctoral candidate to that of a more informed practitioner.

Leigh Quadling-Miernik is still on the road labelled the Doctor of Professional Practice journey, which started in 2021. The project has been looking into professional identity development for tertiary educators but is slowly turning its focus inwards towards her own personal growth. Her passion is for creating learning opportunities for both educator and ākonga, following the mantra "whatever gets to the goal with integrity."
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NOISE AND THE VALUE OF UNPOLISHED THOUGHT

Tim Lynch

In this piece, the reader/viewer is invited into the author's personal observations while trying to replicate the true processes of writing an article for academic publication, a mode of communication at odds with and ill-suited to both his industry background and teaching style. Following these observations, the reader/viewer is invited to watch a YouTube video of the subject matter the author is attempting to address; in this case, the emotion of anger associated with climate change. This process highlights the circuitous path of what Welby Ings (2020) describes as disobedient thinking, where any subject other than the one being written about is explored and distraction embraced.

This piece contributes to the 2025 theme of identity transformation by offering a reflective account of professional un-becoming—a conscious stepping away from sanctioned forms of productivity in order to explore frustration, distraction, and refusal as fertile sites of knowledge-making.

Deliberately written in an unpolished style and informal tone, the work aligns itself with traditions such as Jack Halberstam's (2011) low theory and Johnny Saldaña's (2014) notion of blue-collar qualitative research. These approaches challenge dominant academic norms, inviting readers to reconsider the value of mess, noise, and mental drift as legitimate components of professional and creative inquiry.

The piece also draws attention to the dissonance between traditional academic modes of knowledge dissemination—such as scholarly writing—and the use of mediums more often associated with popular culture and public discourse; in this case, YouTube videos. Rather than positioning written work as the primary vehicle for intellectual thought, this piece inverts the conventional hierarchy: the video contains the more rigorous academic reflection, while the accompanying written text serves as a meta-commentary—documenting the frustrations, contradictions, and emotional labour of "becoming" an academic.

This reversal is intentional and somewhat performative. It seeks to expose and critique the internal tensions that arise when engaging in academic growth while simultaneously working within the context of applied education. The subject of the video—anger—is one of the three central themes underpinning the author's doctoral research. Through this lens, the piece explores the emotional dissonance that emerges when one is inherently more interested in doing than writing; in practice over theory and in action over articulation.

As part of this inversion, the written component maintains the authentic voice of the author acting not only as a literary piece but also as a visual documentation of the frustrations associated with traversing the applied and academic. As part of this authenticity the language has not been edited or doctored but remains an unaltered demonstration of this frustration, in contrast to the polished academic norm. In doing so, the work not only questions the boundaries of academic legitimacy but also repositions emotional states and unconventional methodologies as vital contributors to the production of knowledge, creating a transgressive and responsive multi modal piece.

The video will refer to the concepts and thinkers as outlined in the reference list.

NOISE AND THE VALUE OF UNPOLISHED THOUGHT

Noise, nose , noise – its everyweher , in. the office the constant click clacking of ke boards which act as the interface between ideas and communication, between the ability to transmit - and as sucgh validate – ideas and generate then.

Sitting at my desk I begin to devlop some kind of keyboard envy as the connection between my coliges iedas and there keboards seems lighting fast, like watching a movie on broard band as compared to my dial up seed. There ability to structure and record there ideas seems effortless and fluid, it seems to have a rhythem and flow that exudes productivity, there is no requirmentrs for breaks just a continual tap taping of information and ideas being recorded, complield and filed in logical places and completed withot distraction. Said ideas can then be retrieved effortlessly at any time, on any device, anywhere and understood clearly thus completing the circula flow of efficancy and productivity.

Unfortunatky none of this works for me, I type with one finger on each hand, and rakIther than it being a delicate and elegam=nt process, it's the forcfull manifestation of the frustration that my mind is feeling !

I cant file , in fact I cant even ubnderstand how fileing works – so I just pile – genrally straight to the desktop, much to the dismay of the IT guys. Apparently it does something bad which is the reason my computer has to spontaiously stop, an act ive taken being fond of as it gives me time to have a break.

And rather than being able to maintain productivity, my mind wounders off task- seeming to find interest in the most random of things- that at that moment - are of the greatest importance and urgency and must be taken care off immediately, such as going down stairs to rinse the cup I left on the bench in the staff room. Or conversely my mind will find things that I have never seen before such as pencil pelings on the floor and allowme to construct an entire back storie complete with multiple caricatures about how siad pencil peelings landed on the carpet. Or conversely my mind will allow me to look what is already fimilar -such as the courner of the celling- in a way I have never seen before and place me in a deep and calm meditive state, while this state is pleasant and very relaxing it dosnt aid my quest for productivity.

An example of these distractions is now….currently I am supposed to be writing an article for scope magazine on the role of anger within the frame work of Anger, hope action- an emotional human centric frame work utilized by NGO'S and busnessis alike, and within that look areas of overlapping synergy between design, non-representaional theory and practice theory and inturn how they intersect with Colonialism, industrialisation, and anthropocentrism and from that if there are any connections to Malthusian and cornucopian theorys, and if tge connections are strong enough weather they could form the basisi for a methodology. You can probably see the need for my brain to find distractions now.

But this draws a wider conversation …….with all thr mediums of communication avalible to mankind (a quick and very non-accademic AI serach gave me 29 different methods) why are we focusong on soley the one…… the one which worst suted to me ?

I'm not allone in this,in the article Blue-Collar Qualitative Research: A Rant-Johnny Saldaña writes in his self proclaimed own "red neck blue collar sole " language, as he sees it as being the most appropriate and accurate. I t is full of appropriate profantitys and all the more joyfull for it.

And both it -and the article you are currently reading are examples of '"Low" theory . a concept put forward by Jack Halbertstam, which rejects high academic or elite and rigid knowade systems and instead embraces, failure , nonproductivity and the evryday lived experance of real life as being ligitamite ways of theorising. As such knowade and information can come from many sources.

It accepts ideas and concepts that come from outside accademia, and understands that there is value in unpolised thought, and that it , and life is messy. It ses failure as a core component to resistance.

So as a homage to low theory I give you my paper on the developing methodology for the critic and evatuation of multiple theorys on climate change, which include anthroprocentralisim, cornucopian and Malthusian theory an dhow they inturn overlap with the human emotion of Anger and weather they can be explaned through non-representaional and practice theory.

But if you really want to find out about in this this , it may be simpler to follow the supplyed link (Dutzi, 2025) and simply watch me talk about it.

https://youtu.be/_T1xp-g4rVg

Tim Lynch is a senior lecturer in the Bachelor of Culinary Arts program at Otago Polytechnic, where he focuses on integrating sustainability, carbon reduction, and culinary innovation into his teaching. With a background as a professional chef, Tim has worked in both Europe and New Zealand before transitioning into academia. His academic work is deeply informed by his doctorate research, which explores the intersection of climate change, food systems, and education through the framework of 'Anger, Hope, Action.' Tim's approach to teaching is rooted in constructivist and applied design principles, encouraging students to engage with sustainability and real-world challenges.

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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Submissions for *Scope (Work-based Learning)* should be sent by 30 April for review and potential inclusion in the annual issue to: henk.roodt@op.ac.nz; rachel.mcnamara@op.ac.nz

Scope (Work-based Learning) 8 theme: "Work Reimagined: Reframing Power, Practice, and Purpose."

How are we learning in and through our work? We invite reflections on how power, practice, and purpose are shifting in real work settings. How do people learn through disruption, adapt to new expectations, and navigate the ethical tensions of decision-making? What roles are emerging, what remains hidden, and how is meaning made in the flow of work? We welcome practitioner research, case studies, visual essays, and personal narratives. At its heart, this issue will explore what it means to learn and practise with integrity and purpose in a world of ongoing change.

All submissions will be peer reviewed. Peer review comments will be sent to all submitters in due course, with details concerning the possible reworking of documents where relevant. All submissions must include disclosure of whether and how AI was used in writing the work. All final decisions concerning publication of submissions will reside with the Editors. Opinions published are those of the authors and not necessarily subscribed to by the Editors or Otago Polytechnic.

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Submission formats include: editorials, articles, perspectives, essays, research notes and work in progress. Other formats will also be considered.

High standards of writing, proofreading and adherence to consistency through the APA referencing style are expected. For more information, please refer to the APA Publication Manual, 7th edition and consult prior issues for examples. A short biography of no more than 50 words as well as title; details concerning institutional position and affiliation (where relevant); contact information (postal, email and telephone number) and ORCID number should be provided on a cover sheet, with all such information withheld from the body of the submission. Low resolution images with full captions should be inserted into texts to indicate where they would be preferred, while high resolution images should be sent separately. Enquiries about future submissions can be directed to henk.roodt@op.ac.nz; rachel.mcnamara@op.ac.nz.